BUZZ KILL: CAN HYUNDAI IONIQ 9 TAKE DOWN VW'S BULLI?

BBC TopGear

DECEMBER 2025

FERRARI GOES FULL ELECTRIC!
FIRST DETAILS ON THE CAR THAT HAS ENZO SPINNING IN HIS GRAVE

STARRING...

- LAMBORGHINI REVUELTO
- BMW M2 CS
- HYUNDAI IONIQ 6 N
- PRAGA BOHEMA
- LR DEFENDER OCTA
- PORSCHE 911 GT3 RS MR
- FERRARI 12CYL
- KIMERA EVO37
- PORSCHE 911 GT3 TOURING
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- ASTON MARTIN VANQUISH
- A SODDING GREAT DAKAR TRUCK... AND MORE!

PERFORMANCE CAR OF THE YEAR

12 CONTENDERS, FOUR DAYS, £5.2M OF METAL, 7,785BHP, 112 PASTEL DE NATAS, 64 BALD TYRES, ONE UNEXPECTED WINNER!

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JACK RIX

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BBC TG
Issue 402

We've been talking about it for a while now, but the chasm is beginning to widen. This idea that EVs will become the catch all solution for everyday driving, getting from A to B, family trips etc, and combustion engines will become the preserve of enthusiasts who are prepared to stomach rising fuel costs and taxation. Total separation is yet to occur of course, there are still plenty of excellent petrol and diesel (remember that?) cars out there, and a handful of EVs aimed at speed freaks, but I'm sensing an acceptance that this is how the future will be.

It's a phenomenon brought into relief by our Performance Car of the Year test and the recent Munich motor show where 98 per cent of the new cars shown were EVs – the plucky petrol, manual Renault Clio the only outlier. When it came to assembling our PCOTY hoard, we tried in vain to find something compact and affordable with only a mild surplus of horsepower. Normally this is the where the humble petrol powered hot hatch shines, but there's currently tumbleweed blowing through that bit of the market.

And so of the dozen vehicles assembled only one (the Ioniq 6 N) was electric – a fact that speaks volumes about how Hyundai is really the only manufacturer delivering close to combustion engine thrills in a performance EV right now (can Ferrari pull off the same trick? See p18 for the start of its story). The others all gargled petrol and proved that there's lots of life left in controlled explosions yet... and lashings of creativity at the top end of the market.

Despite our doom-mongering, the V12 lives on, triumphantly, as does natural aspiration and manual gearboxes. Both technologies that were supposedly left behind long ago in the pursuit of power, efficiency and speed, but are now firmly part of the carmaker's arsenal to bring driver engagement back up the priority list.

What it means, though, is – unless you want to go used – performance isn't cheap. A £70k Hyundai EV was the 'bargain', a £90k BMW M2 the most affordable combustion model... and the least powerful car (but also the noisiest) was a full fat Dakar truck, followed by a 911 GT3. Gone are the days of getting your eye in with something front wheel drive and the friendly side of 250bhp... it's all or nothing. Not that I'm complaining.

Enjoy the issue,

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Want the perfect cover shot for your Performance Car of the Year issue? John's your man... we call it Wych-craft

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Famously unflappable, and waited until the final PCOTY photo before succumbing to a mystery stomach bug. What a pro

WHO: ANDY FRANKLIN
TopGear creative director Andy sketched out the whole of PCOTY before the event. Not sure why we bothered to get photos...

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DECEMBER

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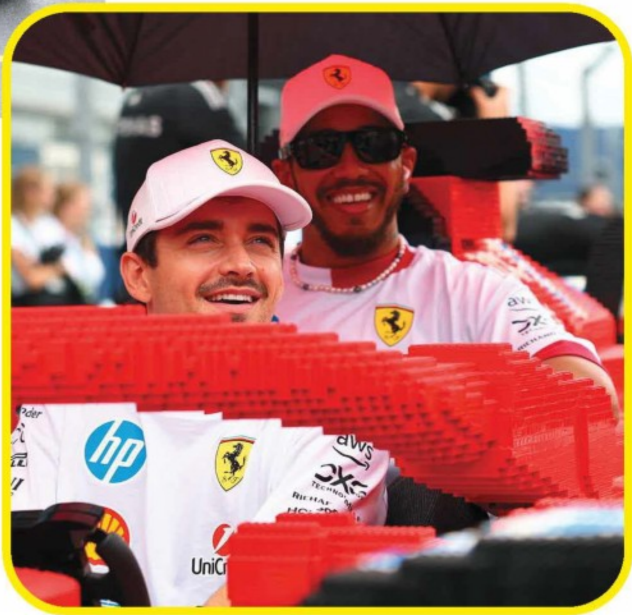

Ready, set...

From life-size cars to brick-built trophies, the **LEGO® Group's** partnership with **Formula 1®** brings fans closer to the action

There's a simple joy to be had in the sight of a row of LEGO® cars parked neatly on your desk or coffee table. It could be a Ferrari here, a McLaren there, or even a full grid of Speed Champions cars. For years, the LEGO Group has fuelled its fans' need for speed by letting people recreate their favourite vehicles brick by brick in the comfort of their home.

But this year, the LEGO Group has taken its builds trackside through a multi-year partnership with Formula 1®. The two icons have shifted things up a gear, reimagining some of the sport's most famous traditions in brick form, with a hope of making Formula 1® more accessible to families and offer a range of sets for new and old builders alike.

Whether it's 10 life-size Formula 1® cars rolling out for the Miami Driver's Parade or trophies made of LEGO bricks at Silverstone, this partnership allows both drivers and fans to celebrate the sport they love like never before. Here are just some of the standout moments from this year's season so far...

A TWIST ON TRADITION

For the Formula 1® Miami Grand Prix 2025, the Driver's Parade ditched its usual 20 cars in favour of 10 fully drivable LEGO® big builds – one for each team. Inspired by the LEGO® Speed Champions range, each car was built from almost 400,000 bricks, weighing 1.5 tonnes and capable of reaching speeds of 20km/h.

A skilled team of 26 designers, engineers and LEGO builders spent more than 22,000 hours crafting the cars at a near 1:1 scale, getting every detail spot on, including sponsor logos, authentic Pirelli Soft Racing Tyres, steering wheels, brakes and throttle pedals, at the LEGO factory in Kladno in the Czech Republic.

This was a series of firsts for the LEGO Group. Not only did the brand produce multiple drivable big builds simultaneously, but for the first time, several Formula 1® drivers got behind the wheel of LEGO cars at the same time.

Since Miami, all 10 builds have embarked on a global tour to bring families closer to the action through surprise appearances at races and events. So, keep your eyes peeled and you might just see one in the wild.

A PLAYFUL PODIUM

From a victorious Nigel Mansell giving Ayrton Senna a lift back to the pits in 1991 to Lewis Hamilton crossing the line on three wheels

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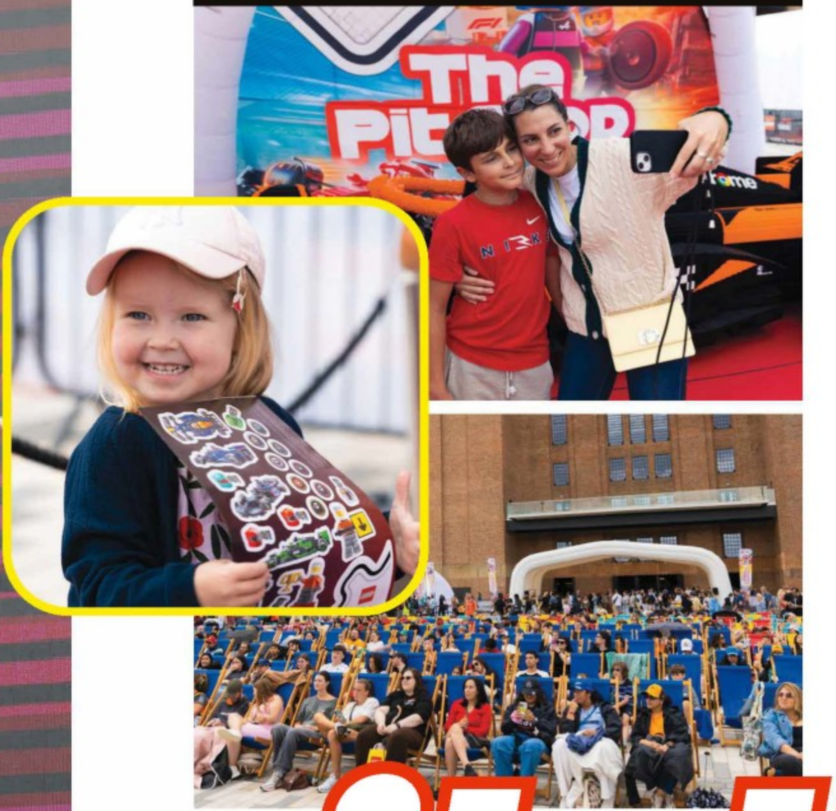

build!

to take a narrow win in 2020, the Formula 1® British Grand Prix at Silverstone has delivered countless unforgettable moments, and the first Grand Prix of July 2025 was no different.

Following 52 intense laps, McLaren's Lando Norris took first place and hoisted a gold-adorned LEGO® trophy, made from 2,717 LEGO bricks. Standing nearly 60cm tall and weighing more than 2kg, it was one of four brick-built prizes assembled by seven master builders at the LEGO headquarters in Billund, Denmark.

Two of the trophies went to McLaren's Oscar Piastri, who came in second, and KICK Sauber's Nico Hülkenberg, who grabbed the third position; they each lifted red and blue models built from 2,298 LEGO elements. Meanwhile, McLaren bagged a dark blue and gold constructor's trophy, also crafted from 2,717 LEGO bricks, for their cabinet.

The trophies were created to celebrate Silverstone's 75th anniversary at the site of the sport's first World Championship in 1950, with all four showcasing intricate touches. The trophies also featured miniature cars – a nod to the LEGO® F1 Collectibles, which include all 10 teams currently on the grid.

A BRICK-FILLED BATTERSEA

For those who weren't able to make it to Silverstone, the LEGO® Group and Formula 1® hosted a free watch party at Battersea Power Station in London. Fans kicked back on deck chairs while watching the race live on a giant screen and took part in adrenaline-fuelled LEGO activities throughout the day.

The highlight for many was seeing the LEGO Big Build McLaren car that was driven by Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri at the Miami Driver's Parade.

Families could put themselves in the driver's seat, too, by tackling F1®-themed LEGO challenges, such as the LEGO Make & Take Zone and the LEGO x F1® Reflex Game. Plus, the on-site LEGO store stocked motorsport-themed sets, including DUPLO, Technic, Speed Champions and more, allowing fans of all ages to take a piece of Formula 1® home with them.

If you're looking for more brick-filled festivities, why not join the LEGO Group and Formula 1® at the Silverstone Lap of Lights from 12 December 2025 to 6 January 2026?

BUILD THE THRILL WITH MORE LEGO® FORMULA 1® FUN, VISIT LEGO.COM/F1 NOW

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TRENDING

UNSUNG HEROES WITH UNHEALTHY OBSESSIONS

WHEEL NUT

From Manchester's murky depths

Scott Adshead had just finished restoring a family heirloom MG when it was drowned in floodwater on New Year's Eve… but he didn't throw in the towel

WORDS OLLIE KEW
PHOTOS HUCKLEBERRY MOUNTAIN

It just looks 'right' somehow. A leaky, draughty garage with no hot or cold running electric inside, backing onto a railway line. The natural habitat of the beleaguered British sports car perpetually midway through a hopeless restoration. But Scott Adshead's MGB GT breaks that mould… while he fights to stop it going mouldy.

Scott isn't your quintessentially bearded MG spanner. He's 28, tinkering under the bonnet in designer trainers when I arrive. And this isn't yet another tedious multi decade marriage killer destined never to turn a wheel. In fact, it's approaching the end of Scott's *second* glow up – after his first attempt was cruelly obliterated by a flood.

"I daily drive it – it never goes away for winter. Old boys see me doing my weekly shop in it and they're shocked, but personally I see it as a good daily," he tells me in a stout, no nonsense accent. "But maybe that's 'cos I've got the capability to fix it now."

When Scott first began working on the car, he was at the mercy of the Manchester climate "working on it in all weathers, even the snow", so finding a garage to rent ("they're gold dust round here") was a godsend, however dingy. But given he works in IT, didn't even learn to drive until he was 26 and has no previous mechanical or engineering experience, what possessed him to set about a 50 year old MG with the toolbox?

"I grew up on the Isle of Man so anyone who knew me as a kid knew me as a bike person. I never had any interest in cars! This was sat tucked away in the back of a garage at my girlfriend's nan's house. Al, her granddad, passed away in 2000 I believe. So many people had asked to buy it but her nan was like 'No, leave it in the garage, it can stay there'. I just sort of stumbled into the garage to go and put something away for her and I was like, 'How have I not known this has been here?' I'd been living in that house for about two years at that point."

“I daily drive it – it never goes away for winter. Old boys see me doing my weekly shop in it and they’re shocked”

Pah, what's a bit of rust? Add a few zeros to the value and it would be patina

> "I was sure it'd been swept away, turned over, the car would be gone"

UNSUNG HEROES WITH UNHEALTHY OBSESSIONS

WHEEL NUT

Future plans include fitting fenders and an outboard motor

ARE YOU A WHEEL NUT?

GET IN TOUCH WITH US AT EDITOR@BBCTOPGEARMAGAZINE.COM

The little MG is looking a bit drier these days

Scott asked his nan in law if he could get it running, and became a self taught mechanic armed with his dad's advice. "They're pretty simple things at the end of the day, and weren't ever built that brilliantly when they were new. So like my old man says, it basically needs three things – fuel, air and a spark."

If this was a Hollywood story, of a young lad finding purpose and meaning in the resurrection of a beloved family motor, then you'd need the tragedy at the end of the second act to tee up the climax. And on New Year's Eve 2024, shortly after Scott had the car taxed, tested and back on the road running errands and commutes, the car gods lobbed one down in the form of a torrential storm.

"We had friends over for New Year's and we thought 'Instead of just putting on a *Peep Show* box set, let's properly go out'. It was raining, but it rains in Manchester all the time." Scott had parked the MG at the far end of his flat complex's car park – right next to the river. So when 170mm of rain fell in just 18 hours, it was first in the firing line as the River Tame burst its banks. "Even I had to laugh. The name of our road was Water Street..." Scott grins ruefully.

The first he knew of the disaster was returning home from revelries and finding the fire brigade rescuing residents from his apartment block. The water was so deep even the roof of the MG was completely submerged. "I was sure it'd been swept away, turned over, the car would be gone," he remembers. But it appears the British Leyland MG was so leaky to begin with, it steadily filled with water as the storm took hold and basically weighed itself down.

"To get to our flat, the fireman had to lead us through the flood. He had his big waders on and we were just in jeans. It was chest deep, and I don't think I've ever felt anything so cold in my life. And that was after we were a couple of drinks deep..."

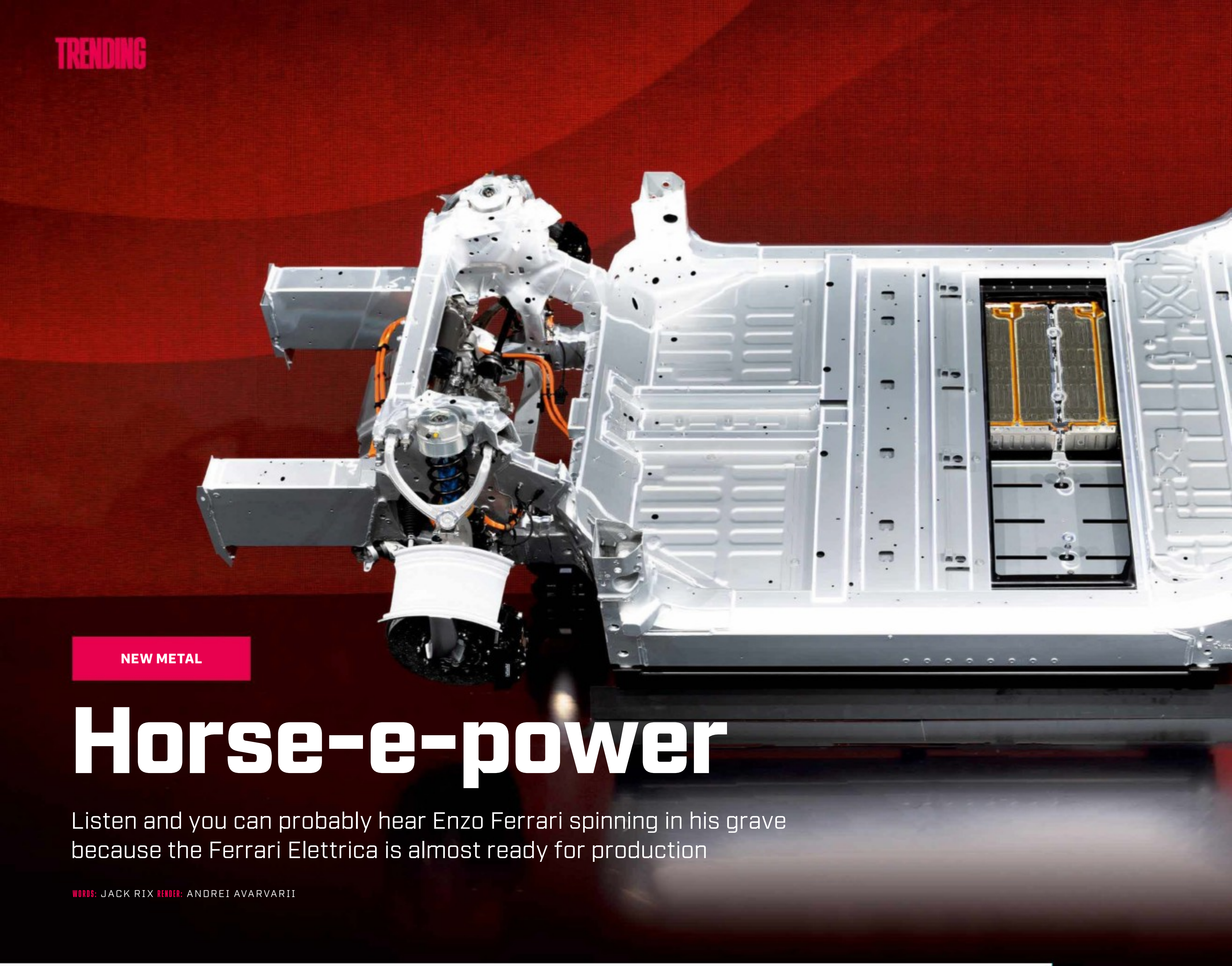
"At about seven in the morning on New Year's Day, everyone's panicking in the building group chat. 'What's going on? Are we being rescued?' Downstairs a load of firemen were arriving so we chatted to them. They were like 'We've just seen this really old car in the corner, it's completely had it'. And I was like, 'Yeah, that's my car'."

As the waters receded Scott's neighbours opened their cars' doors to water gushing out, but the leaky MG had drained. He briefly thought it might be dry inside, but everything was coated in a thick layer of filth, with rumours abounding over raw sewage in the floodwater. Undeterred, he wrapped a plastic bag around the steering wheel so he could manoeuvre the MG around, and set to work. A local recovery company moved the car to safety for free, and within hours of its ordeal the MG was having its oil drained. "Well I say oil, it was all just water and sand.

"That was all in the snow. Neighbours thought I was crazy but I knew if I was sitting around sad, I would be dwelling on it, worrying about how much work I had to do. Then I jet washed it three or four times, and couldn't believe how much sand kept coming out of it. I stripped the interior but I'm still finding sediment in it." You can follow his progress on his Instagram @scottheadz179.

Now outfitted with a newly upholstered cabin, running a stopgap engine while the original motor is away being tuned for more power, Scott's MG is once again roadworthy, only months since the British weather attempted murder. The paintwork needs looking at, but it'll never be a garage queen.

"I don't like concours and show cars. Getting things pristine is not in my remit because of the amount that I use this car – I don't even trust myself to work on the interior now it's all retrimmed, I'm worried I'll wipe oil off my jeans everywhere."



NEW METAL

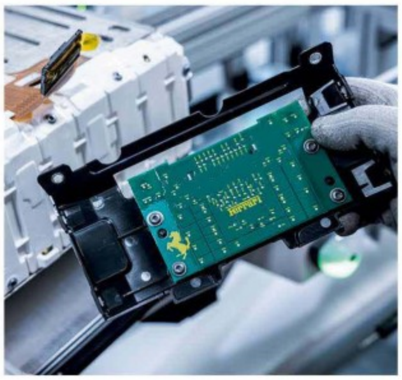
Horse-e-power

Listen and you can probably hear Enzo Ferrari spinning in his grave because the Ferrari Elettrica is almost ready for production

WORDS: JACK RIX **RENDER:** ANDREI AVARVARII

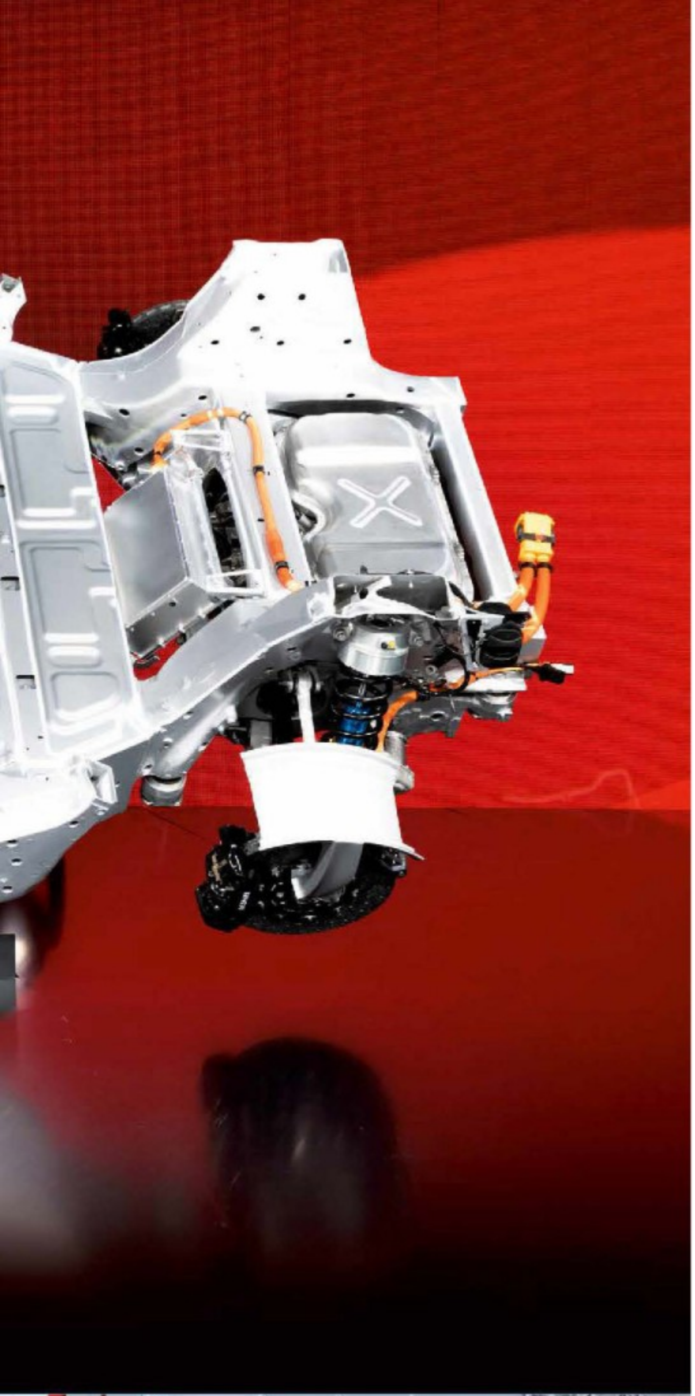
WE'LL HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL THE FIRST half of next year to see the interior and exterior design of the first all-electric Ferrari, one we know designer Jony Ive of Apple iPhone fame has had a hand in. That's when we'll also learn the real name – Elettrica is just a working title for now – but to whet our appetites, Ferrari has revealed a glut of details around the chassis, motors, batteries and software and we went to Maranello to take all in.

Starting with the motors. There are four of them, two on each axle – permanent magnet synchronous motors, with Hallbach array rotors no less. All you need to know is they're derived from F1 tech, almost identical to those you'll find on an F80 and designed and built in-house. The front motors produce a combined 282bhp, the rear a combined 831bhp, for a total somewhere north of 1,000bhp (you don't simply add them, final figure is still tbc) with a faintly absurd torque figure of 2,582lb ft on the front axle and 5,900lb ft on the rear. The 1,183bhp F80 pips it as the most powerful Ferrari ever, but with a 0–62mph time of 2.5secs and a top speed of 193mph, it's no slug.



The battery is a chunky 122kWh, with a range of around 330 miles and thanks to an 800V architecture it can charge at up to 350kW. Those batteries by the way are also designed and assembled in-house and have the highest energy density of any production EV in the world, says Ferrari – 195Wh/kg.

The suspension is a development of the 48V active system already seen on the Purosangue and F80, sound will come via a high precision accelerometer attached to the rear inverter, picking up the vibrations and amplifying them into the cabin. A paddle shift system will increase power (right paddle) and regen (left) creating similar sensations to a traditional gearbox. On this evidence we have little doubt the world's most thrilling carmaker can build an EV that's thrilling to drive… question is, will anyone want one?



Inside each of those cells is actually a tiny V12 engine

HIT or MISS

Two titans of the editorial team have it out

JACK RIX

TG'S EDITOR-IN-CHIEF BELIEVES FERRARI CAN DO IT

Predictably, the online love for an electric Ferrari is lower than its CoG... and I sympathise to an extent. A Ferrari without an engine is like a 99 without a Flake – frankly what's the point? But there are currently 14 separate Ferrari models you can buy with combustion engines, so if you're not an EV fan, you're not exactly short on choice. As engineering exercises go, finding out whether Ferrari can find a way to inject excitement into the electric experience is fascinating – and it's clearly getting creative in plugging the 'engagement' gaps left by the lack of noise and gears. I think the haters are in for a shock.

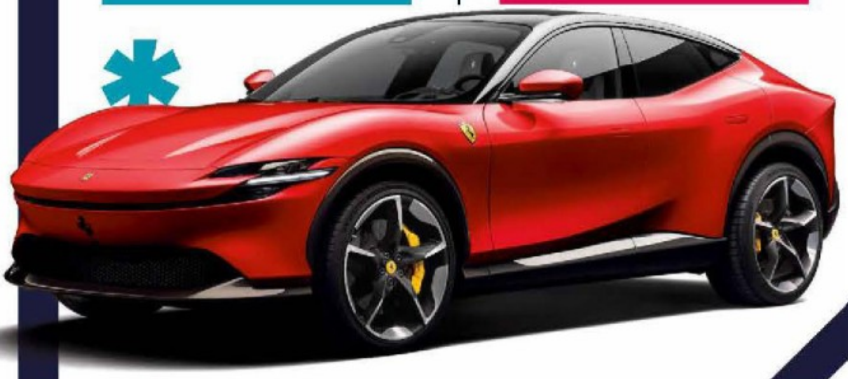
"Ferrari is getting creative in plugging the gaps"

SAM BURNETT

THE EV AFICIONADO AND TG SUB EDITOR ISN'T CONVINCED BY THE ELETTRICA

Oh great, what I really want from a new electric Ferrari is to see the batteries first, thanks. Was a Ferrari ever launched with a teasing glimpse of a shapely fuel tank? I went to the Design Museum a few years ago to see a thing about Ferrari, I enjoyed hearing how the first lot were bashed together by hammering at a sheet of metal with a wooden frame underneath. There was real heritage and craftsmanship at work. What will we have now? "Meet Lorenzo, he's been sculpting lithium-ion packs since 2021." I'm not saying this new car won't drive well, but I'm already bored, and that'll be the death of Ferrari.

"Not saying it won't drive well, but I'm already bored"



*TG's very unofficial render – let's be honest, we're probably miles off

THE GOOD

AT LAST A MANUFACTURER WHO THINKS ABOUT WHAT YOU NEED RATHER THAN WHAT YOU WANT

Bridge2fa

Looks great and I love the concept

Hookey

This is the direction we should be going, not the overweight, oversized, ugly SUVs

Colin Oliver

LOOKS GOOD, SEEMS PRACTICAL AND PROMISES TO BE CHEAP

Eastbam

WOW! Get on with it! Love it!

The Kranky

THE BAD

Multipla has a strong competitor

Paweł Malinowsk

I will just laugh as you drive past

Craig Wythe

Looks like a shoebox on wheels

Roger Gredsund

Disappointment, in vehicle form

Tyler Gustafson

IT'S NO OIL PAINTING IS IT?

Lewis Graham

THE UGLY

Inspired by a blind person with a crayon

Philip Bradley

PEOPLE WHO BUY THESE TYPE OF CARS IS WHAT'S WRONG WITH BRITAIN

Tim Vanhulst

If Ugly and Tragic had a child...

David Lee

It is an ugly microwave on wheels with the potential of bursting into flames at any time

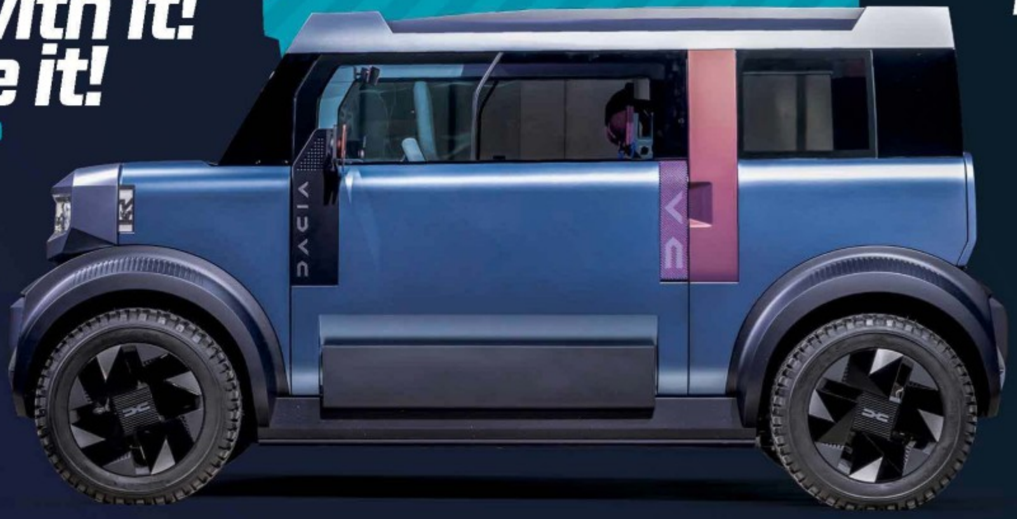
Murlock Murphy

Looks like a washing machine

Luke Sykes

COMMENTS

DACIA HIPSTER



CITROEN 2CV. FIAT 500. MINI. VW BEETLE. DACIA HIPSTER. Wait… what?

Before you get too excited, the Hipster is officially still just a concept. But it's got our attention, for all the size of it. It's 3m long and 1.5m wide yet there's room for four adults inside, and the boot can swallow up to 500 litres. It's 20 per cent lighter than Dacia's electric tiddler, the Spring, and aims to halve the carbon footprint over its life cycle compared to the best EVs currently on sale.

The Hipster also acknowledges another important issue: even cheap electric cars are still too expensive to work as mass mobility solutions. Hence the allusion to those, yes, iconic 'people's cars' mentioned at the start. It's time for another paradigm shift.

Dacia says it offers enough range for daily journeys and would only need to be recharged twice a week. In the UK, the average motorist travels 19 miles per day. On which basis, everything can be smaller, lighter and more 'essential'. **JASON BARLOW**

PORSCHE
CAYENNE
50
15

NEXT BIG THING

WIRELESS CHARGING

WORDS: PAUL HORRELL

THE ELECTRIC PORSCHE CAYENNE looks like being the world's first car where you can option wireless charging. Fortunately there's now a defined standard for this, SAE J2954. It's neater than trailing wires, and wouldn't need socket boxes mounted on walls or poles. It's a boost for disabled drivers who find heavy cables and plugs a struggle.

As with a Qi phone charger, the pad on the ground contains coils powered by alternating current, producing an alternating magnetic field. That induces a current in the coils in the charged device or car. For your phone, pad and device need to be touching. In a car, there's an air gap. The Porsche reduces it by lowering itself in the air suspension. It can charge at 11kW, so efficiency is comparable to cable charging.

The ground coil sits at a tiny standby power all the time. The approaching car senses this, and uses triangulation between a set of small auxiliary coils to figure out the position of the ground pad, so the car's display helps you to manoeuvre into the exact spot for charging. That part of the standard is called Differential Inductive Positioning System (DIPS).

Full charge power then begins automatically, or whenever you've set the car's app to take advantage of cheap electricity. Don't fret about your pet or the local wildlife: a motion detector cuts power if a creature crawls into the warm snug space between car and pad. There's also protection against metal foreign objects, which would get hot otherwise.

It's going to be an expensive option at £5k plus. As well as needing armouring for both the ground and vehicle pads, the electronics aren't simple. The ground pad takes 50Hz AC from the mains, then converts to DC, then back to AC at the standard's defined 85Hz.

On the car side, the 85Hz current coming out of the pad coils is converted to DC and feeds directly into the battery. Because different cars have different battery voltages and charge systems, you can't just strap a universal accessory pad under your car and hope for the best.

Since most car charging happens at home, this'd be a very frequent saving of a couple of minutes a time versus wrestling with a cable at the start and end of a charge. Adds up in the life of a busy Porsche driver.

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE...

HONGQI S9

What is it?

A red flag. No, really. Hongqi, the luxury offshoot of the state-owned 'China First Automotive Works Corp' translates into English as 'red flag'. To them, it's a sign of good luck, not a warning. Hongqi mainly shills wannabe Bentley barges, but in 2021 it promised a hypercar designed by Audi R8 scribbler Walter de Silva.

Did they actually build any?

So far... no. In 2023 a model popped up at a posh Italian concours event. The pure electric setup had been apparently binned off, for a 1,400bhp hybrid V8 good for 0–60 in 1.9secs and 250mph flat out. With that agreed, the price was set with 99 units, for a million quid a pop.

Where are they now?

Hongqi is still churning out the plutocratmobiles, but there's no sign of the S9 on its website, nor on any concours lawns. Meanwhile, the 300+mph Yangwang U9 has utterly legged it with the Chinese hypercar hype headlines...

KUDOKE
GERMANY

BLOW THE
BUDGET

Kudoke 1
For a handmade, hand wound watch from a company that has won many awards for its designs, this is a bit of a bargain. Powered by the Kaliber 1, Kudoke's first inhouse movement, housed in a 39mm steel case with exhibition back. Note the signature infinity symbol on the blue hour hand. **£8,966; kudoke.eu**

WATCHES

Watch kraft

Germany's once massive watch industry all but vanished. Now it's fighting back

WORDS: RICHARD HOLT

BY THE START OF THE 20TH century Germany was making millions of clocks and watches, making it one of the biggest producers in the world. But with the minor inconvenience of two world wars, the Germans saw their watch industry crumble. The Swiss meanwhile went from strength to strength, helped of course by staying neutral and making watches for both sides.

Germany's postwar economic miracle is well known, but the watch industry was largely left out. Recently though, German watchmakers have started carving out a little niche for themselves.

Many small independents are springing up around Germany. And while most of them still need to lean heavily on the Swiss for parts, many are starting to do a lot more by themselves.

Kudoke is a good example. Founded by master watchmaker Stefan Kudoke, it started off small in the early 2000s, making hand engraved, skeletonised art watches. By 2018, it had levelled up to the point where it could start making its own movements.

These watches are not cheap, but good German independents are not only found at the posh end of the market. Sternglass has watches for under £200 and its designs adhere to the 'form follows function' principles of the Bauhaus school. So if you like the BMW E30 and other Bauhaus influenced cars, this could be the one for you.

PRO TIP

The Bauhaus was a German design school credited with influencing everything from watches, cars, flat roofs and office chairs to the fonts on your laptop. It opened up in 1919 and ruffled feathers from the start, leading it to be shut down by the Nazis in 1933. Cue the teachers moving abroad, spreading minimalism worldwide.

UNDER **£4K**

NOMOS Glashütte Ahoi Neomatik
This company was founded after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when the former East German watchmaking town of Glashütte got back on the capitalist path. It started off importing movements, now it make its own. **£3,720; nomos-glashuette.com**

UNDER **£2K**

Mühle Glashütte 29er
This family owned firm was founded in the 19th century and once made speedometers. They are also quite into boats and this one takes its name from the 29er – a type of racing dinghy, apparently. Automatic movement in 42.4mm steel case. **£1,890; muehle-glashuette.de**

UNDER **£500**

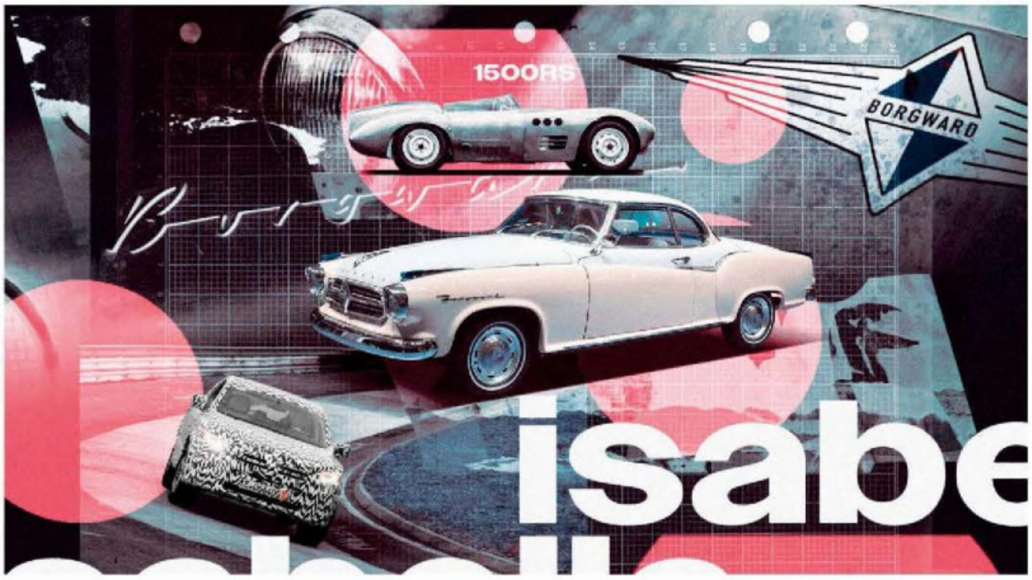
Sternglas Marus 2.0
Sternglas makes very accessibly priced quartz watches, and even this automatic version is a bargain, with a reliable Seiko movement in a 42mm bronze PVD coated steel case. Rotating aluminium bezel, screw down crown, 200m water resistance. **£499; uk.sternglas.com**

The finest failures in automotive history

EPIC FAIL

BORGWARD

WORDS: SAM PHILIP



To misquote Oscar Wilde, for a car brand to die once may be regarded as misfortune. For the same brand to die twice looks like carelessness. But such was the fate that befell poor Borgward, the German car company that, in 2022, suffered the ignominy of kicking the bucket not for the first, but second time.

Borgward was founded in Bremen in the 1920s, and hit its zenith in the 1950s, when its Isabella briefly became one of Germany's bestselling posh saloons. In 1953, Borgward's Porsche-ish 1500 competed at the Le Mans 24 Hour Race. It didn't quite make it to the finish, but it went quite a long way and looked rather pretty while doing so. But in the early 1960s, Borgward suffered financial meltdown, blamed by some on a sprawling product portfolio, and by others on totally mad finances.

It would remain so for half a century, until the late 2000s when it was revived by Beiqi, an offshoot of China's BAIC megacorp. Arriving with grand promises of conquering Europe and shifting 800,000 cars a year, by 2017 Borgward was selling a small range of powerfully forgettable SUVs, mostly in China.

> **"Borgward imposion was blamed by some on a sprawling product portfolio, others mad finances"**

And then, a couple of years after, it… wasn't. Failing to conquer Europe beyond a single dealer in Luxembourg (no, really), Borgward suffered financial meltdown, again, and by 2022 was dead in the water. Again. Hardly surprising – Beiqi doubtless hoped to trade off the historic brand cache of the Borgward name, perhaps forgetting that anyone who remembered Borgward first time round would have been in their late 70s at the very youngest.

At the risk of sounding name-ist, Epic Fail feels Borgward's chances of global success weren't helped by the fact that Borgward – to the English ear at least – is not a beautiful word. In fact, it's down there alongside 'pustule'. And 'seepage'. And 'phlegm'. Probably best leave it lie this time, lads?

THRILLS WITHOUT THE BILLS

Fast(ish) cars you can actually afford

TOYOTA GT86

What is it?
A front engined, rear wheel drive coupe. Much like an Aston Vantage. Both are immense fun to drive. But one doesn't cost an arm and leg to buy and insure.

Why are we interested?
Essentially you've got a similar recipe, but the GT86 has half the cylinders, nearly a third the power and two thirds the weight.

So… it's the same but not?
It is. But a new V8 Vantage is £165k. A really nice GT86 can be had for sub-£15k. And you'll get more driving thrills.

What should I buy?
The GT86s were all 2.0-litre boxers, so there's just trim choices and condition. We'd look for a 2013 version with under 60k miles on the clock.

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Readly

Robert Underling, chief engineer at British robotics firm **TrustUs Laboratories**, brings exclusive updates from the autonomous tech front line

DOWN WITH DRIVER-LESS
DOWN WITH DRIVER-LESS
DOWN WITH DRIVER-LESS
KEEP HUMANS BEHIND THE WHEEL!
TrustUs Laborato
Taxi for MR FENTIMAN
CABS

SELF-DRIVING DIARIES

THE SCENE OUTSIDE THE GATES OF TrustUs Labs had turned ugly. Having somehow got wind that BORIS (our rolling, AI powered autonomous test bed who is also a malicious old Ford Mondeo) recently completed his first robotaxi trial journey – perhaps because I wrote about it at length in *TG* magazine – several dozen local taxi drivers were staging a protest.

The mob were chanting and holding placards reading "DOWN WITH DRIVERLESS", "KEEP HUMANS BEHIND THE WHEEL", and "MR FENTIMAN", though with hindsight I realise the last was just a regular cabbie collecting Mr Fentiman from our office. The fact BORIS's maiden robotaxi journey had been, at best, a limited success – what with it ending in multiple speeding tickets and the wanton destruction of a bridal salon – seemed, if anything, only to stoke the cabbies' fury further.

In truth, the protest was not unexpected. The self driving revolution shall have its winners and losers. Taxi drivers will likely be among the first victims, their skills rendered redundant in an autonomous roadscape. My attempts to explain this to the cabbies – and to point out they should simply have chosen a more futureproofed occupation – were not received in the helpful spirit intended.

More unexpected, however, was the sight of BORIS himself in the midst of the protest. Not engaged in his usual pastime of 'squirting washer fluid into the eyes of unsuspecting humans', but something far worse – trying to enrol in their union.

Yes, our self driving car had joined the anti self driving car protest. Boris, it transpired, had been unimpressed to learn he was officially classified as 'office equipment', and was now requesting to be recognised as an official TrustUs employee, complete with all staff perks. Quite what a 2003 Mondeo would do with full dental coverage was unclear, but BORIS remained insistent.

If we did not comply, BORIS threatened to boycott all further autonomous driving trials, and also to email my wife and reveal exactly how much I've lost in crypto this year. We really need to disconnect BORIS from the office wifi.

After some robust discussions, I am pleased to report Boris has agreed to accept the title of vice president of honking, and a three day working week. Hopefully this promotion will quell his malevolent tendencies!

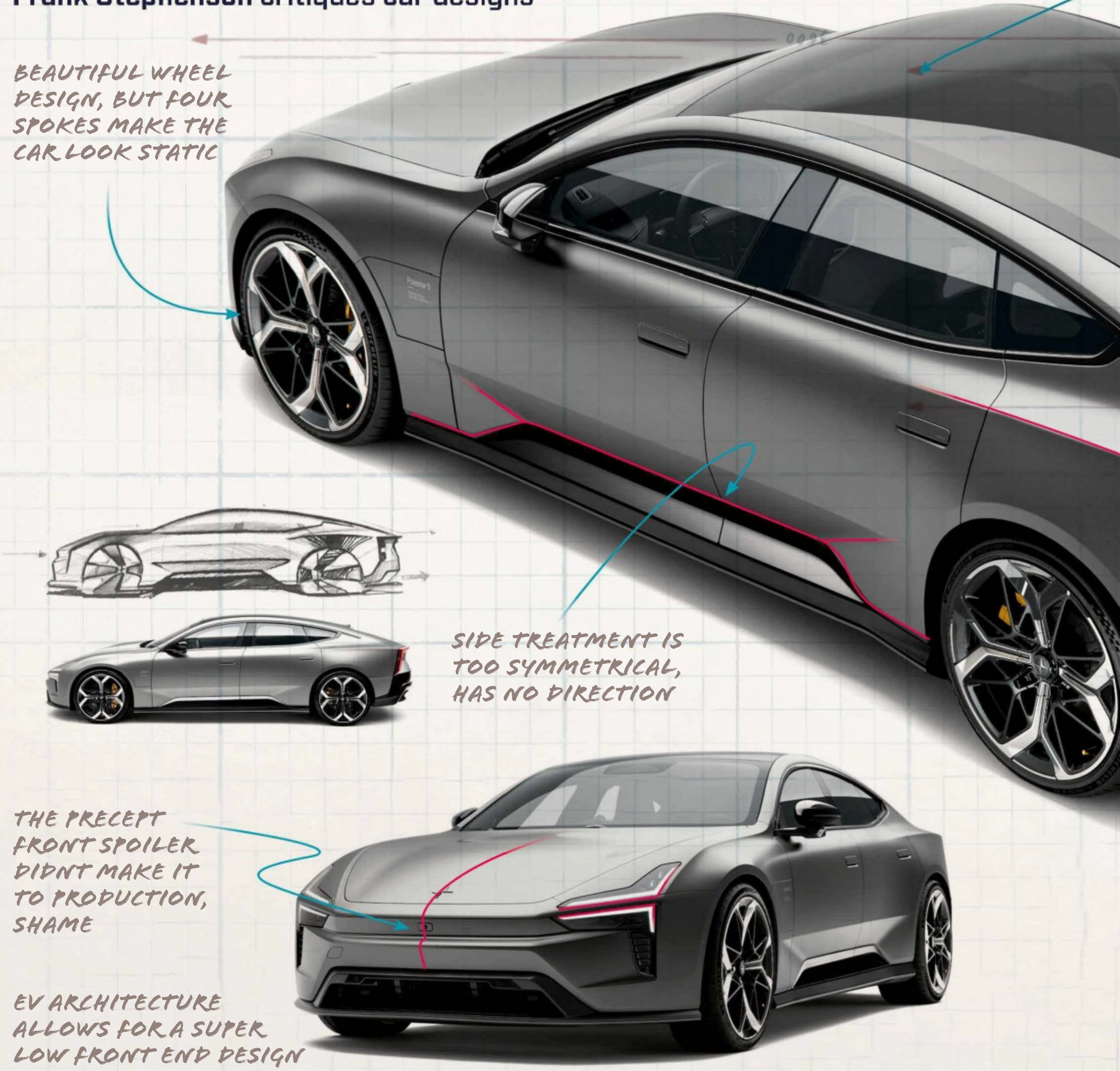
> **"More unexpected, however, was the sight of BORIS himself in the midst of the protest"**

NEXT MONTH: **GREATER MALEVOLENT TENDENCIES**

IMAGE: GETTY

HOT OR NOT?

Frank Stephenson critiques car designs



EXTENDED GLASS AREA BREAKS UP VISUAL MASS OF THE BODYSIDE

BEAUTIFUL WHEEL DESIGN, BUT FOUR SPOKES MAKE THE CAR LOOK STATIC

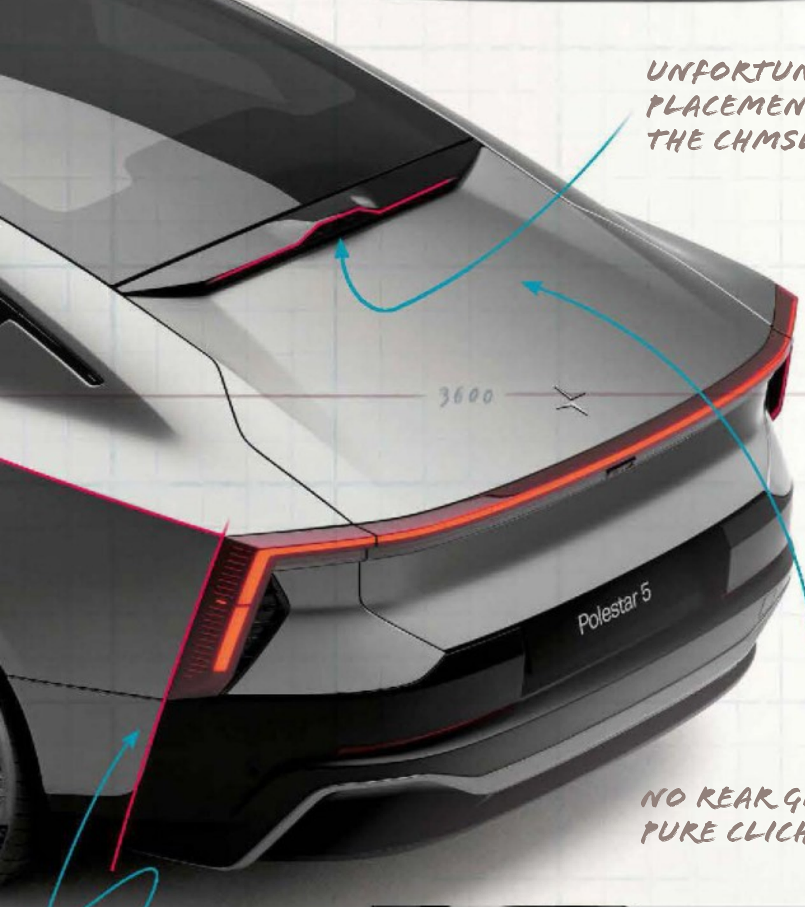
SIDE TREATMENT IS TOO SYMMETRICAL, HAS NO DIRECTION

THE PRECEPT FRONT SPOILER DIDNT MAKE IT TO PRODUCTION, SHAME

EV ARCHITECTURE ALLOWS FOR A SUPER LOW FRONT END DESIGN

GREAT STANCE, BUT WEAK REAR LIGHT SIGNATURE

UNFORTUNATE PLACEMENT OF THE CHMSL



NO REAR GLASS, PURE CLICHE!

POWERFUL REAR SHOULDER LEADS TO SHARP REAR END WITH STRONG KAMM TAIL, GREAT FOR AERO

CLEAN AND MINIMAL INTERIOR, BUT WHERE IS THE SOUL?

What's Frank up to?

Started the month with a keynote speech at the London Packaging Week conference around automotive luxury design. Then another trip to Shanghai to continue working on bringing AutoFlight's Prosperity 1 and Cargo eVTOLs to market, combined with a visit to the new design offices in Dubai

Polestar 5

POLESTAR, BEING A RELATIVELY NEW BRAND ON THE market, has the objective to create a unique design path that reflects Scandinavian values and principles. With the new Polestar 5 it's definitely achieved that, albeit using a few tricks.

Credit goes to Nahum Escobedo, who's very successfully managed to create a faithful production car out of its Precept concept model from five years ago. Although five years can be an eternity in the car design world these days, the 5's exterior design still manages to come across as a fresh product for the brand. Typically Swedish, it whispers simplicity and zero flashiness.

Starting at the front, the only standout feature, in the absence of a characteristic grille, is the Thor's hammer shaped LED headlights, with a lighting signature seemingly inspired from brother brand Volvo. The Precept's very cool and very effective nose wing appears to have lost either the final engineering or the final marketing battle and now there's just a dramatically dropping front bonnet and fender surface area, helping to hint at a sports car's low nose design. Radar and sensors are well integrated into the no breathing/all seeing zone of the front bumper.

Turning to the side, the 5 combines good and not so good design features to deliver a mildly pleasant profile. An obviously aviation inspired cabin to body proportion works well, with the beautifully extended dark glass roof helping to lower the car's visual height. But the lower body side, showing no directional bias, is much too symmetrical in its overall graphic to emphasise any sense of forward direction. It regrettably reduces the 5's dynamic impression. Beautiful, open designed, and polished wheels, albeit static with an even number of spokes, compliment the sportiness of this high performance GT.

VERDICT **HOT**

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ON SALE 13 NOVEMBER

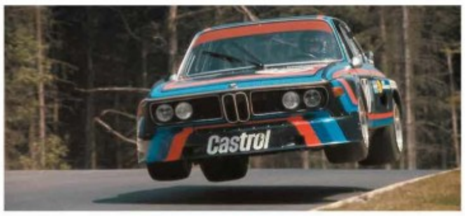
TOP 9 COOLEST CAR NICKNAMES

WORDS: GREG POTTS

TopGear
PRODUCTION
OFFICE

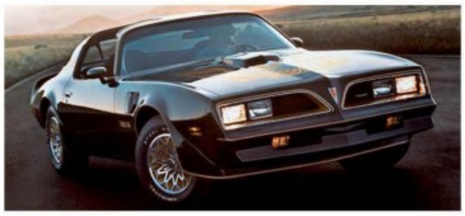
CLOWN SHOE

The BMW Z3 M Coupe is objectively a pretty ugly car. Its weird long bonnet and bloated rear end are all kinds of wrong and saw it christened the Clown Shoe. And yet, we love it. Apparently, it was a bit of a skunkworks project by BMW engineers and the board took some convincing.



BATMOBILE

BMW claims that it was fans of the brand that christened the 3.0 CSL 'Batmobile' thanks to its ludicrously aggressive aero. The look even made it onto the final 167 homologation-special road cars, although the rear wing wasn't road legal so came in the boot ready for buyers to attach themselves.



SCREAMING CHICKEN

No, we're not talking about those annoying squeaky dog toys. The Screaming Chicken was the colloquial name given to the massive decal on the bonnet of the Pontiac Firebird Trans Am. It was so popular that other manufacturers introduced their own versions...

FLYING BRICK

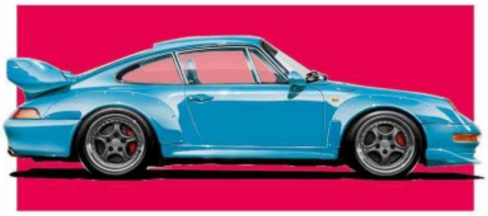
Do we really need to explain the origin story of the Volvo 240 Turbo's Flying Brick nickname? Heck, just look at its slab sided goodness. The racecars genuinely flew too, with ETCC and DTM titles in 1985. And of course the 240 Turbo walked so the 1994 850 Estate could run.

THE HAMMER

With a full name like Mercedes-Benz 300E 5.6 AMG, it's no surprise this bonkers pre-merger AMG was given a nickname. What a moniker it was though, with Hammer referring to the brutal acceleration provided by AMG's 5.6-litre V8 that was reworked from its role in the larger 560 SEC coupe.

BEAST OF TURIN

Ever been to Goodwood Festival of Speed? The Fiat S76 is a fan favourite at the Duke's driveway hillclimb, mostly because it uses a mahoosive 28.4-litre four cylinder engine that spits flames. Yeah, Beast of Turin works. Originally built as a land speed record car in 1910.



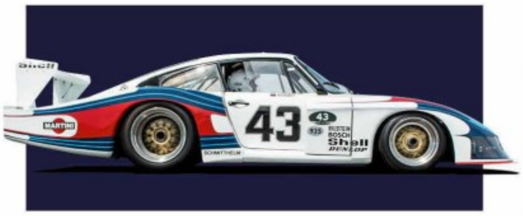
WIDOWMAKER

To create the 993 generation 991 GT2, Porsche took a Turbo and stuck on widened arches then sent it on a crash diet. They also decided to give it more boost and then stripped out the AWD for good measure. It didn't suffer fools, hence the tag.

NISSAN
calsonic
TOTAL

GODZILLA

The AWD R32 Skyline GT-R was given its infamous nickname by Australian press as it obliterated its competition in the local touring car championship in the 80s and 90s. The name stuck, but officials banned turbocharging and AWD in the ATCC after two years of dominance.



MOBY DICK

One glance at the long nosed, long tailed 935/78 in Martini livery and it's fairly obvious why it was compared to Herman Melville's fictional white sperm whale. Built to win at Le Mans with up to 850bhp at the rear wheels, reliability issues meant it finished eighth.

ADVERTISEMENT FEATURE

BBC TopGear.com
THE ELECTRIC AWARDS
RENAULT 4
Electric Car of the Year

BONJOUR LE 4

Meet the stylish, smart, spacious and affordable *BBC TopGear.com EV of the Year*: the **Renault 4**

Good people deserve good cars, and good cars deserve awards. So here we are, with millions of British motorists primed for their first ever EV, and the Renault 4 E-Tech electric is the newly crowned *BBC TopGear.com Electric Car of the Year*. You can see where this is going.

There are many reasons to choose the Renault 4, but you haven't got all day, so here are four: it's practical, it's packed with tech to make your life easier, it qualifies for the government EV Grant and, well, it's a looker. In fact, let's start with that, shall we?

STRIKING DESIGN

How do you make a car look like the future? Take a little bit of inspiration from the '60s! At the beginning of a decade transfixed by the space race, the original Renault R4 was born and became a design classic.

So, you'll be glad to know that retro-futurism abounds on the new 4's exterior, blending classical notes seamlessly into its thoroughly modern aesthetic. For a start, there's the recognisable wide, horizontal grille, except now it's lined with a svelte strip of lighting to match the illuminated Renault logo at its centre.

Other iconic aspects, such as the round headlights and unique lengthened silhouette, have all been channelled through a contemporary lens to lend the 4 an unmistakable sense of purpose.

SMART TECH INTEGRATION

Being a leading light in this new generation of EVs, the Renault 4 is unsurprisingly stuffed to the gills with gizmos.

Enjoy connected driving with the openR link multimedia system, featuring dual 10-inch screens[1]. Here, you can take advantage of having Google built in[2]. This allows you to access real-time navigation with Google Maps, which automatically adjusts your route based on any obstacles and your Renault's energy consumption, as well as plan your electric journeys with

The Renault 4's retro-futuristic design complements its impressive everyday practicality

routes optimised for charging points. And if all that convenience has got you in the mood to sing, you can use voice control with Google Assistant and access up to 100 apps, including Waze and Amazon Music via Google Play, as well as for basic in-car functions like the seat warmers.

A PRACTICAL FAMILY CAR

The Renault 4 is a car perfectly equipped for everything urban everyday life can throw at it. A longer wheelbase of 4.14m provides greater rear-seat comfort and increased boot capacity, making it an intriguing alternative to the Renault 5 for those with a large brood, or adventurers planning expansive road trips.

Speaking of which, you can optimise all that space for whatever configuration of people and cargo you need, thanks to the 40/60 split-folding rear seat.

Plus, the hands-free electric tailgate[1] and low loading sill allow for easy access to the boot, so your knees and back will thank you for that. As will your passengers, with 16.4cm of knee room in the second row of seats.

A GREAT CAR AT AN EVEN GREATER PRICE

As part of the Plan for Change initiative, the government offers a £650 million Electric Car Grant that can give you a useful head start of £1,500. That means you could own a *BBC TopGear.com Electric Car of the Year*, with plenty of advanced design and tech, starting at a hugely competitive £25,495[3]. That's a better deal than you'll get with many similar cars in the Renault 4's category. So the only question left to ask is: pourquoi pas?

EXPLORE THE FULL, AWARD-WINNING EV RANGE AT RENAULT.CO.UK

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1. Available in techno trim. 2. Google, Google Play, Google Maps, Waze and other marks are trademarks of Google LLC. 3. Price including £1,500 electric car grant.

MIKE'S CHANNEL

Q: IS LANCIA OVERDUE A TRIUMPHANT RALLY RETURN?

There must be a term that describes precisely how I, and I assume the majority of the population, feel about professional rally drivers. An oxymoronic combination of having the utmost respect for them, but also harbouring a nagging suspicion that there were a few components left on the counter when their brains were being wired up. The Germans almost certainly have a word for it.

I love modern rallying, and Rally Monte Carlo specifically is an annual non-negotiable in terms of my household television privileges. But much like you never forget your first kiss, or the first time you tasted a sticky toffee pudding, you never forget the first rally car you fell in love with. For me it was the Lancia Delta HF Integrale, decked out in those iconic Martini Racing stripes. The image of that pugnacious Italian hatchback launching over a snowy berm during the Swedish rally is one of my earliest automotive memories. For me, Lancia *was* rally.

Which is ironic, really, because not long after, in 1992, Lancia wasn't rally at all. The brand unceremoniously pulled out of the sport entirely and wouldn't compete again for over 30 years. In those three decades I've got a lot bigger, a lot uglier and watched in horror as the hair on my head has started to migrate.

At least during this long hiatus, video games did their bit to cement the legend of the Delta HF Integrale, most notably in 1994 arcade classic *Sega Rally*, which centred around a duel between Lancia's compact, chuckable Delta and the faster but more unwieldy Toyota Celica. For a brief, glorious period in the mid 1990s, every British pier from Blackpool to Bognor featured a sideways, gravel spraying Lancia.

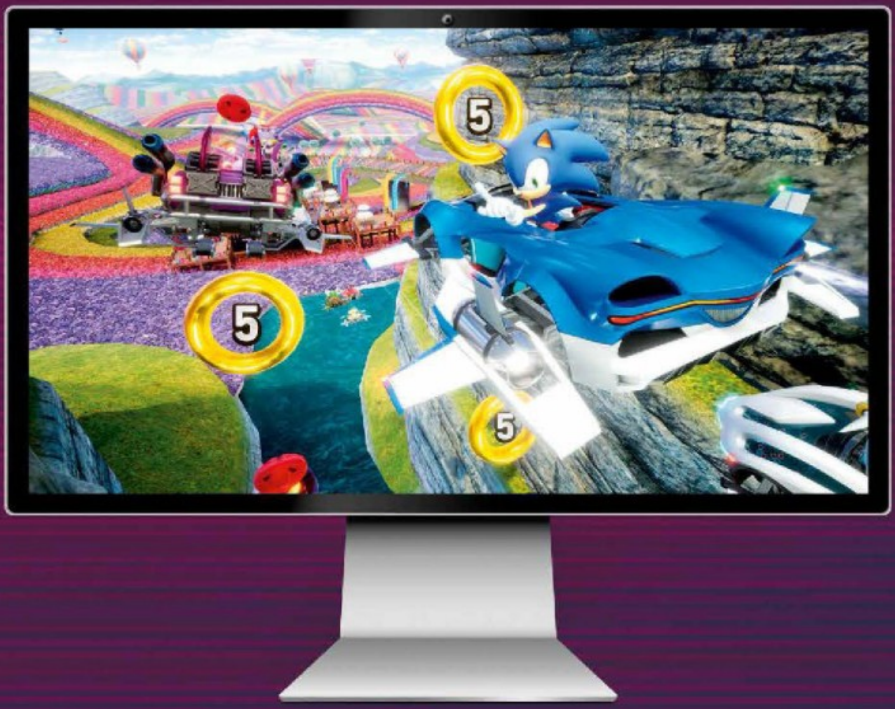
With all this in mind, you'll forgive me for getting just a smidge excited as Lancia is in the process of making its long awaited return to rallying in 2025. It was recently testing its Ypsilon HF Rally2 machine in preparation for next year's Rally2 championship, the WRC's equivalent of Formula 2. And fortunately it looks considerably more purposeful than the previous generation road going Ypsilon, which demonstrated that even the reliably stylish Italians can have an off day in the design studio.

As if all this wasn't enough reason to crack open a celebratory bottle of your preferred brand of dry vermouth, there's even a rally Lancia on the way for folks who don't have a lucrative alcoholic drink sponsorship. The newly announced €40k Ypsilon HF Racing is a front wheel drive, homologated Rally6 car designed to attract absolute newcomers to the sport and priced to match that ambition. While it only has a 145bhp engine, that engine sits in a legitimate competition chassis, complete with rally trappings like short ratio gearing, a mechanical differential and a full roll cage. Best of all, it sits on basic steel wheels like an old Peugeot 106 Rallye. I'd better start writing my grovelling letter to Santa right now...

Mike Channell is a TG writer, multimillion subscriber YouTuber and occasional racing driver. Not evidence of a strong work ethic, just an attention span obliterated by too many video games

ILLUSTRATION: WALTER NEWTON

GAME OF THE MONTH



SONIC RACING CROSSWORLDS

£50, Playstation/Xbox/Switch/PC

Typically, cars and hedgehogs don't mix well, but that hasn't stopped Sega producing racing games starring its spiny mascot, of which *Sonic Racing Crossworlds* is the latest. What next, *Sonic the Hedgehog Bonfire Nesting Simulator*? In spite of the deranged premise, *Sonic Racing Crossworlds* is great. That's partly down to the titular *Crossworlds* mechanic, where the second lap of every race takes place on a completely different track. If you include the *Crossworlds* tracks there's a total of 39 circuits and they are all visually arresting and well designed. The game is tricky for younger kids, and the balanced distribution of power ups you get in *Mario Kart* isn't as deftly implemented here, meaning those lagging behind are likely to remain there. If you're prepared to take the time to master it, though, *Crossworlds* boasts both depth and quality. And if it keeps Sonic away from those bonfires, all the better... **MC**

GEAR

CaDA 1:10 MAZDA 787B

modelsport.co.uk; £84.99

It may not be the gloriously green and orange Le Mans winning No.55 car, but we still want to build this excellent CaDA 1:10 scale replica of the iconic Mazda 787B. It's a 1,797 piece set and can even be upgraded to a proper RC car with a 'power upgrade kit'. Rotary noises not included.

ASTON MARTIN EGG3

eggstroller.com; £2,500+

Luxury baby buggy maker Egg recently announced that it had become "the official stroller partner of Aston Martin". This means three special edition Lance Strollers in classic Aston colours that use genuine Aston Martin leather, lots of quilting and wheels inspired by the Valour and Victor. Perfect for baby Bond.

TOP TRUMPS GODDIT!

Toptrumps.com; £9.99

Described as a "fast paced, shout it out card game from Top Trumps", Goddit features 55 puzzle cards and five different game types. There are apparently themes from classic Top Trumps packs including World Football Stars, Supercars, Dinosaurs and Dogs, but we're more interested in why there's an Alfa 4C on the tin...

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JETHRO BOVINGDON

PCOTY? Sick in more ways than one, explains Jethro

Last month I ranted about the vomit inducing decadence of Car Week, in Monterey, California. Even thinking about it makes me want to have a long shower. However, there is another tonic that's even more revitalising. We call it Performance Car of the Year and it's, well, amazing.

The concept is simply to celebrate the fastest, coolest, most exciting and wildest cars to have arrived in the past 12 months. This year the execution involves three days at Portimão racetrack and a further two days on some fantastic roads nearby.

It's also a great chance for *TG*'s staff and contributors to get together and share embarrassing stories, frustrations, tales of derring do and hopes and dreams for the year ahead. For the video crew it's a chance to trial wildly complex camera rigs and leave the photographers with about six minutes per day to shoot the gorgeous stills for the magazine and website.

However, this year's PCOTY had a new and unforeseen element and played out like a kind of cruel *TopGear* x *Squid Games* collaboration. Every day our numbers would dwindle, colleagues succumbing in ever more gruesome and chilling ways. Ollie Marriage announced the evil in our midst in the most shocking way possible. First the colour drained from his face, then he reported feeling a bit queasy. Moments later he scurried to the toilet and was violently, vociferously sick. Food poisoning, norovirus or demonic possession? Nobody could be sure.

> **"This year's PCOTY played out like a kind of cruel *TopGear* x *Squid Games* collab"**

Ben Pulman fell next. All 7ft 3in of him. Press offices have nightmares about his seek and destroy all objections approach to booking cars. If this thing could infect and disable *TG*'s very own T-1000 weapon of mass organisation, then how would anyone be spared? More importantly, how would we function without him repeatedly telling us to sign forms?

Next up the art department lost its kingpin, creative director Andy Franklin. Honestly, nobody noticed, but it did make the evening karting race less of a foregone conclusion. Digital director Simon Bond made it to the chequered flag but fire hosed the hotel lawn with vomit once we arrived back. And so it went on. Who would be next? If the Stig could talk I suspect even he might question the wisdom of an immaculate white race suit.

But some of us did survive to the final day. The strongest. The most committed to the cause. And it was going so well. Until some enthusiastic locals turned up to swoon over the cars and show us pictures of their Mitsubishi Evo collection. We bonded despite the language barrier and before leaving they opened the door to the van they'd arrived in and offered us various baked goods.

Head of content Rowan Horncastle – unbowed by the horror of recent days – dove for an innocent enough looking pastry. As he took a courageous, generous bite, one of our number enquired as to the filling. The reply was devastating and swift. "This one prawn." That night, Rowan left the survivors and crossed over to the other side. He hasn't been seen since. Who knew PCOTY could be even more vomit inducing than Car Week?

Host of TopGear America, Jethro has driven most things, mostly sideways, and forged a reputation as one of the world's most fearless road testers. Only one thing terrifies him – electric cars

PHOTOGRAPHY: TOM BARNES

ZAK BROWN

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NATALIE PINKHAM

PINKS

Grosjean's return to an F1 car is inspirational says Natalie

Bahrain, November 2020. At the exit of turn 3, on the opening lap of the race, Romain Grosjean's car made contact with Daniil Kvyat's Alpha Tauri. Grosjean's car split in two, was engulfed in flames, and for 28 harrowing seconds it seemed impossible that he could emerge from the fireball. I was watching with my husband and kids, all of us in terrified silence. The whole of Formula One collectively held its breath. Then Romain somehow climbed from the inferno, forcing his body upward, despite the searing heat. He then hauled himself over the barrier, his hands scorched and his body battered. He later told us, in that moment he thought of his children, and refused to accept that this was the end.

It was something that transcended sport: raw survival against the odds. It was also a tremendous testament to modern motorsport safety – halo, fireproof overalls, medical response – but above all else, it was about his determination to live.

That determination manifested over the five years that followed. That November night in 2020 could have been the closing chapter of his racing story. Few would have questioned him, but Romain, like so many of his racing counterparts, is just not wired that way. He saw an opportunity to prove something to himself, his children and the wider world. He rebuilt himself piece by piece. First came the healing of his hands, then the courage to climb back into the cockpit. He took on the fresh challenge of IndyCar, proving that his talent and tenacity had not been extinguished. In September 2025 he drove an F1 car again.

> "I was watching in terrified silence. The whole of Formula One held its breath"

Romain told me that to get back in the car felt fantastic. More than that though, it was about reuniting with key people who shaped his story. He picked out Ayao Komatsu, who has been on Romain's journey every step of the way, going back all the way through his 179 Grands Prix. Ayao was with him as performance engineer, race engineer, chief engineer and now of course team principal of Haas. Romain said there was a lot of emotion in the buildup, but once he was immersed in the cockpit "it just felt like home". The most poignant moment was undoing his seatbelt quietly, and gently lifting himself out the car. He felt grateful. He said it was "beautiful".

"How was this last five years? Eventful. I've learned a lot, I've watched Formula One develop from the outside, but getting back into it for a day was great. My health? Within a few months after the accident, I was back to normal. Mentally, I was always ready to come back. Even from my hospital bed, I wanted to be back in an F1 car."

Thank you Romain, your story has reminded us that courage is not the absence of fear, but the refusal to be defined by it. You've shown us that scars can be symbols of strength, and that life itself is the greatest victory.

Natalie Pinkham is first and foremost a motorsport nut, but also a presenter for Sky Sports F1. Nobody knows more about the sport, or has better behind the scenes access to the paddock and drivers

PHOTOGRAPHY: TOM BARNES

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PERFORMANCE CAR OF THE YEAR

2025: a stellar vintage for fast cars. We gathered the 12 best, packed Stig and headed for the sunshine. Welcome to the biggest, baddest, smokiest performance car test in the world...

PHOTOGRAPHY JOHN WYCHERLEY & MARK RICCIONI

PCOTY
2025
MANTHEY
AW·M 9921
Praga

WORDS OLLIE KEW **PHOTOGRAPHY** JOHN WYCHERLEY

MEET THE CONTENDERS

WELCOME TO PERFORMANCE CAR OF THE YEAR 2025. THAT'S RIGHT, NOT 'SPEED Week'. We've had a refresh of our sports car showdown's name, because 'PCOTY' is easier to understand. We're not ragging round at vmax for seven days. This extravaganza, the highlight of the *TopGear* calendar, is dedicated to finding this year's greatest fast car.

Our tried and tested *TG* format remains unchanged. We've invited an eclectic bunch of mouthwatering metal to Autódromo Internacional do Algarve, better known to Brits as the Portimão circuit in southern Portugal.

It was rightly put on the international map by hosting two F1 GPs during the COVID seasons of 2020 and 2021. If its wild elevation changes, blind crests and challenging collection of technical and tyre killing corners was a challenge for the world's best drivers, it'll sure sort the best from the rest among our contenders.

Once we've whittled the grid down to a shortlist of five, through a few heats and offbeat groupings, we'll set off onto the roads of the Algarve to find an overall champion. This isn't a quest to set the fastest lap time, or hit the highest top speed. We're here to seek out a car that's exciting regardless of how quick it is. Something that has the magic, the glint of genius, a machine that feels like a *moment*. We're also here because Stig gets cranky if he's not unleashed on a big scary racetrack once a year.

As ever, there were cars we campaigned for that didn't make it along. The Corvette ZR1, Lamborghini Temerario and Ford Mustang GTD were all unable to attend. We searched in vain for a decent new hot hatchback or lightweight, but the landscape is tragically desolate. Reigning champ McLaren is having a fallow year, which seems to have helped the F1 team.

Ferrari said it was too soon for an F80, so it sent along something with the correct number of cylinders instead. Fair enough.

So, sit back, belt up and place your bets. Only one can be *TopGear*'s 2025 Performance Car of the Year. Let's find out which...

ASTON MARTIN VANQUISH

ENGINE 5.2-litre TT V12, 823bhp, 737lb ft
GEARBOX 8spd auto, RWD
PERFORMANCE 0–62mph in 3.3secs, 214mph
WEIGHT 1,835kg
PRICE £335,545

▸WHY IT'S HERE
Loony Vantage and spaceship Valkyrie starred in 2024 – will the mega GT live up to Aston's rich recent form?

▸MOST INTERESTING FEATURE
That barmy engine. The mightiest V12 ever put into the nose of a road car – but can it put the power down?

▸MOST LIKELY TO
Boost Michelin's share price to record highs by the end of lap one.

BMW M2 CS

ENGINE 3.0-litre TT 6cyl, 523bhp, 479lb ft
GEARBOX 8spd auto, RWD
PERFORMANCE 0–62mph in 3.8secs, 188mph
WEIGHT 1,700kg
PRICE £86,800

▸WHY IT'S HERE
CS M cars veer between the spectacular and the cynical. Can a 2-Series really be worth almost 90 grand?

▸MOST INTERESTING FEATURE
Is that a brutalist ducktail on the bootlid or is it just pleased to see us?

▸MOST LIKELY TO
Cause a fist fight over what's the optimal M1 and M2 mode setup.

FERRARI 12CILINDRI

ENGINE 6.5-litre V12, 819bhp, 500lb ft
GEARBOX 8spd DCT, RWD
PERFORMANCE 0–62mph in 2.9secs, 211mph
WEIGHT 1,565kg *(dry)*
PRICE £336,500

▸WHY IT'S HERE
The latest V12 Ferrari is a bit more GT and a bit less psycho. Was that the right call?

▸MOST INTERESTING FEATURE
Pop up rear spoilers add 50kg of downforce. They fold down again at 186mph to increase vmax – challenge accepted.

▸MOST LIKELY TO
Get punched in the steering wheel for its idiotic touch sensitive buttons.

LAMBORGHINI REVUELTO

ENGINE 6.5-litre V12 + three e-motors, 1,001bhp, n/a lb ft
GEARBOX 8spd DCT, AWD
PERFORMANCE 0–62mph in 2.5secs, 217mph
WEIGHT 1,892kg
PRICE £450,000

▸WHY IT'S HERE
It's a big bad V12 Lambo. Wearing a fancy paintjob. 'Nuff said.

▸MOST INTERESTING FEATURE
Ability to shoot twin flames out of its backside. Stand back, everyone.

▸MOST LIKELY TO
Upset the noise limit police. Then outrun them.

LAND ROVER DEFENDER OCTA

ENGINE 4.4-litre TT V8, 626bhp, 590lb ft
GEARBOX 8spd auto, AWD
PERFORMANCE 0–62mph in 3.8secs, 155mph
WEIGHT 2,585kg
PRICE £145,300

▸WHY IT'S HERE
Can Land Rover's ultimate off roader cut it as a speed merchant? LR reckons so...

▸MOST INTERESTING FEATURE
Octa mode includes launch control coded for fast getaways on a loose surface. Prepare to be pebbledashed.

▸MOST LIKELY TO
Get stolen and stripped for parts.

MASERATI GT2 STRADALE

ENGINE 3.0-litre TT V6, 631bhp, 530lb ft
GEARBOX 8spd DCT, RWD
PERFORMANCE 0–62mph in 2.8secs, 201mph
WEIGHT 1,365kg *(dry)*
PRICE £273,510

▸WHY IT'S HERE
Only plus 10 extra horsepower, minus 60 kilos. Does Maserati's 'hardcore' MC20 add up?

▸MOST INTERESTING FEATURE
Weird kink in rear wing pinched from pre-2022 F1 cars. Will it be a secret downforce monster?

▸MOST LIKELY TO
Depreciate £20k per lap.

PHOTOGRAPHY MARK RICCIONI

FORD RAPTOR T1+

ENGINE 5.0-litre V8, 355bhp, n/a lb ft
GEARBOX 6spd sequential, AWD
PERFORMANCE 0–62mph in 2.9secs, 110mph *(est)*
WEIGHT 2,010kg
PRICE £1m *(est)*

▸WHY IT'S HERE
Because Ollie Marriage will not travel without a rally car in his hand luggage.

▸MOST INTERESTING FEATURE
Some 350mm of Dakar proof suspension travel. That's more than Ollie's mountain bike.

▸MOST LIKELY TO
Spend more time airborne than touching dry land.

HYUNDAI IONIQ 6 N

ENGINE Front and rear e-motors, 641bhp, 586lb ft
GEARBOX 1spd, AWD
PERFORMANCE 0–62mph in 3.2secs, 160mph
WEIGHT 2,200kg *(est)*
PRICE £70,000 *(est)*

▸WHY IT'S HERE
What's the Ioniq 5 N's synthesised yobbery like when it's transplanted into a super saloon shape?

▸MOST INTERESTING FEATURE
Drift mode now offers 10 levels of sideways customisation to coach you into holding bigger skids.

▸MOST LIKELY TO
Be extremely popular until the range warning light comes on.

KIMERA EVO37

ENGINE 2.1-litre turbo & supercharged 4cyl, 505bhp, 406lb ft
GEARBOX 6spd manual, RWD
PERFORMANCE 0–62mph in 3.1secs, 190mph
WEIGHT 1,100kg
PRICE £750,000

▸WHY IT'S HERE
Too many restomods are more about the show than the go. This one isn't…

▸MOST INTERESTING FEATURE
Where to start? The artful exhaust? The military grade ignition switch?

▸MOST LIKELY TO
Be persistently surrounded by a puddle of drool.

PORSCHE 911 GT3 TOURING

ENGINE 4.0-litre flat six, 503bhp, 332lb ft
GEARBOX 6spd manual, RWD
PERFORMANCE 0–62mph in 3.9secs, 194mph
WEIGHT 1,461kg *(with rear seats)*
PRICE £158,200

▸WHY IT'S HERE
Because of those lovely brown envelopes Porsche posts to car critics (not really, don't write in).

▸MOST INTERESTING FEATURE
Weird waggly lever between the seats. Might catch on!

▸MOST LIKELY TO
Win? The 911 S/T was runner up in 2024 and Porsches rarely flunk these showdowns.

PORSCHE 911 GT3 RS MANTHEY

ENGINE 4.0-litre flat six, 513bhp, 343lb ft
GEARBOX 7spd DCT, RWD
PERFORMANCE 0–62mph in 3.2secs, 177mph
WEIGHT 1,425kg *(est)*
PRICE £292,599

▸WHY IT'S HERE
Because a racing team has tried to make the wild GT3 RS even more extreme. Is it Nürburgring, or Nürburgwrong?

▸MOST INTERESTING FEATURE
Monster aero package ups downforce from 860 to 1,000kg without increasing drag. Turn one is flat, yeah?

▸MOST LIKELY TO
Have lunch served on its rear wing.

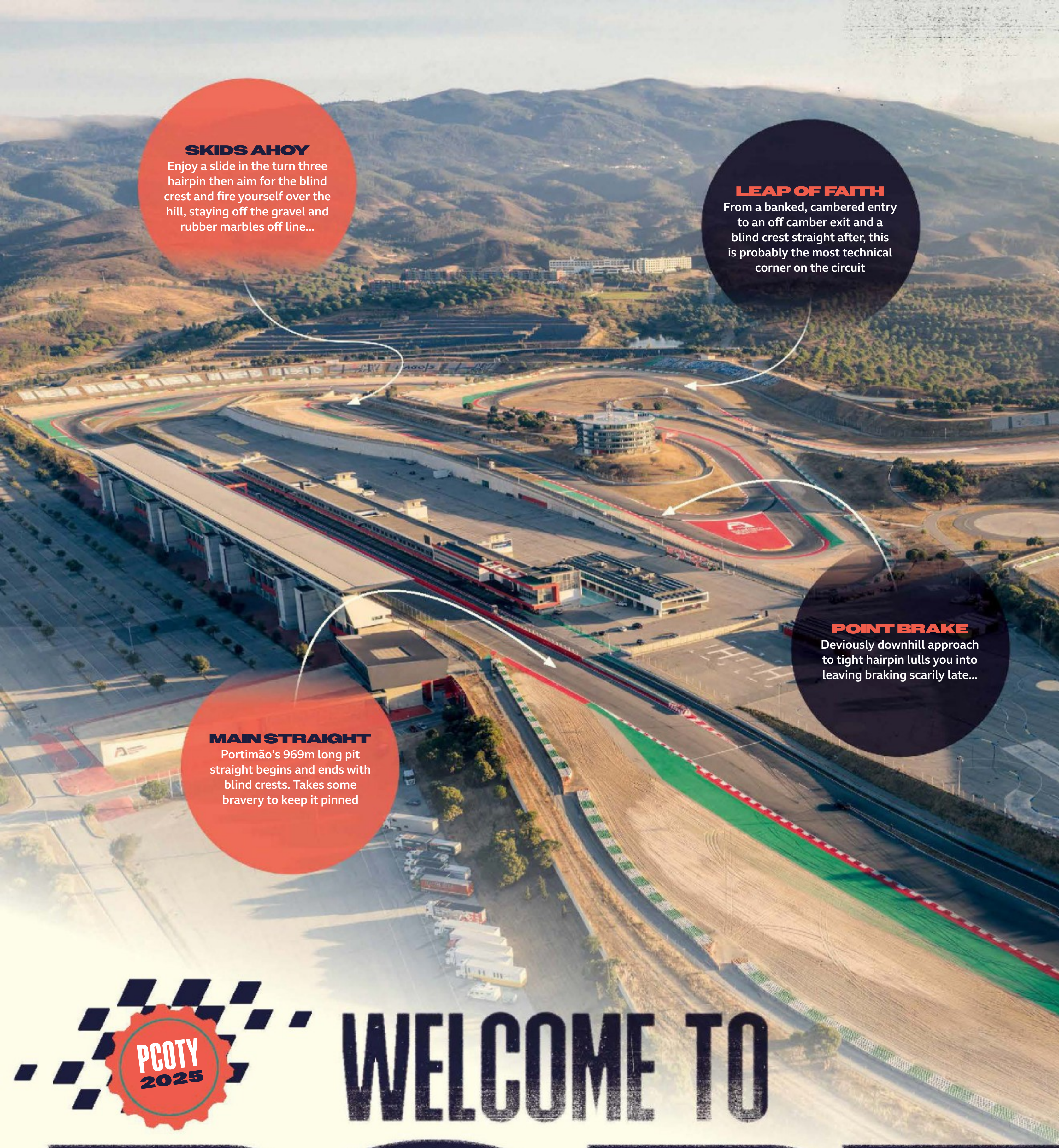
PRAGA BOHEMA

ENGINE 3.8-litre TT V6, 700bhp, 535lb ft
GEARBOX 6spd semi-automatic, RWD
PERFORMANCE 0–62mph in 2.3secs, 197mph
WEIGHT 982kg *(dry)*
PRICE £1.32million

▸WHY IT'S HERE
Czechia's upstart road racer is breaking lap records, but can anyone besides The Stig survive the *g*-force?

▸MOST INTERESTING FEATURE
It weighs 900kg more at 155mph than when it's standing still.

▸MOST LIKELY TO
Be mispronounced by Tom Ford. And give everyone neck ache.



SKIDS AHOY
Enjoy a slide in the turn three hairpin then aim for the blind crest and fire yourself over the hill, staying off the gravel and rubber marbles off line...

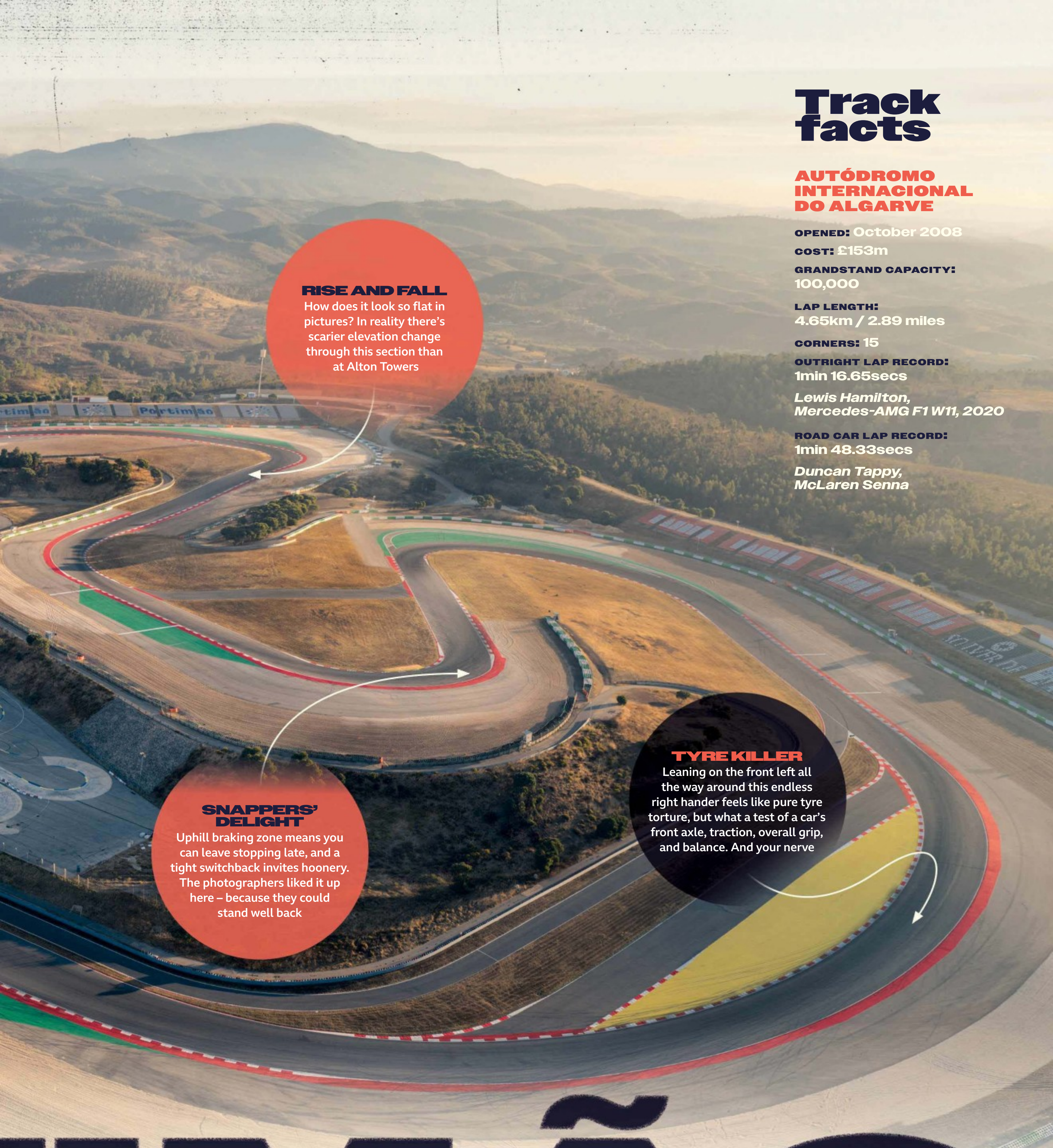
LEAP OF FAITH
From a banked, cambered entry to an off camber exit and a blind crest straight after, this is probably the most technical corner on the circuit

POINT BRAKE
Deviously downhill approach to tight hairpin lulls you into leaving braking scarily late...

MAIN STRAIGHT
Portimão's 969m long pit straight begins and ends with blind crests. Takes some bravery to keep it pinned

PCOTY 2025

WELCOME TO PORT



RISE AND FALL
How does it look so flat in pictures? In reality there's scarier elevation change through this section than at Alton Towers

SNAPPERS' DELIGHT
Uphill braking zone means you can leave stopping late, and a tight switchback invites hoonery. The photographers liked it up here – because they could stand well back

TYRE KILLER
Leaning on the front left all the way around this endless right hander feels like pure tyre torture, but what a test of a car's front axle, traction, overall grip, and balance. And your nerve

Track facts

AUTÓDROMO INTERNACIONAL DO ALGARVE

OPENED: October 2008

COST: £153m

GRANDSTAND CAPACITY: 100,000

LAP LENGTH: 4.65km / 2.89 miles

CORNERS: 15

OUTRIGHT LAP RECORD: 1min 16.65secs

Lewis Hamilton, Mercedes-AMG F1 W11, 2020

ROAD CAR LAP RECORD: 1min 48.33secs

Duncan Tappy, McLaren Senna

IMÃO

PCOTY 2025

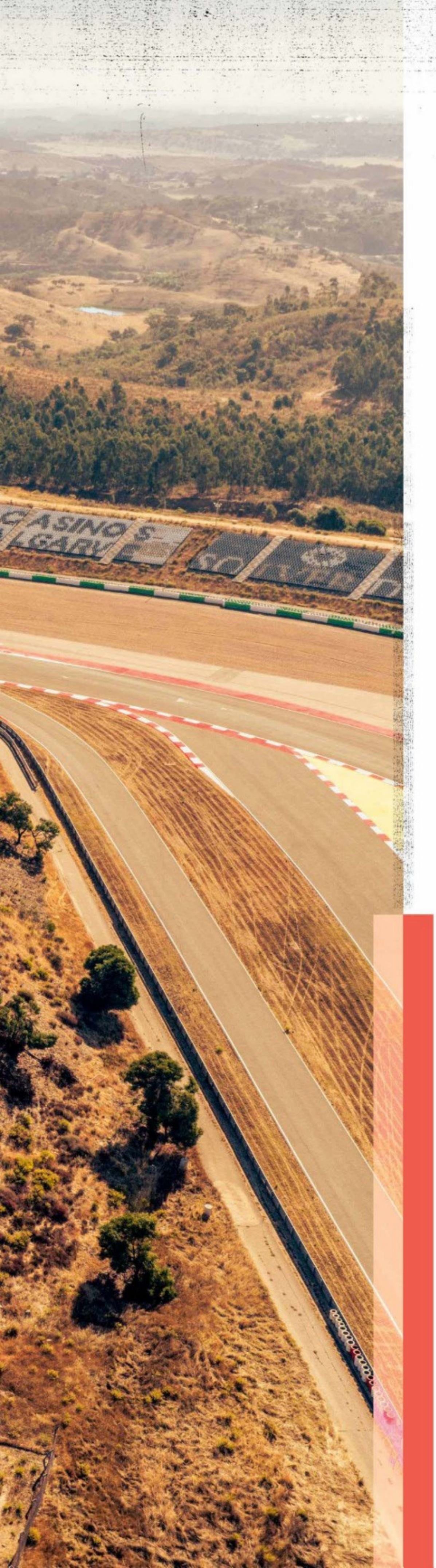
V12 FOR

How would you prefer your V12? As it comes, with turbos on the side or boosted by electricity?

WORDS OLLIE MARRIAGE **PHOTOGRAPHY** JOHN WYCHERLEY

VICTORY

“A DECADE DOWN THE LINE, AND EACH CAR STILL HAS A 12 BANGER UNDER THE HOOD”



THREE HUNDRED AND THREE KPH DOWN THE MAIN STRAIGHT.

THAT WAS THE LAST GLANCE I DARED TAKE. ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHTY eight miles per hour in, what, sixth gear? I couldn't really care less, because I'd given myself over to the Revuelto by then, just wanted to luxuriate in the noise, the fury, the fire and drama of the V12 for as long as possible. Sat back and bathing in an experience I never want to stop, I find it tough to snap out of my dream state and remind myself to nail the brakes for Turn 1.

Oh well, back to reality and I'll deal with some corners if I must. But then I need another hit. Maybe one more rip snarling flyby for the people on the pitwall. Or two. Or maybe I'll go and see if the Aston Martin has the same effect on me. And then the Ferrari.

The V12. We kept being told the party was over, that the fun police were moving in, imposing cylinder shutdown and forever impounding the world's greatest engine configuration.

Reader, please hear our interrogation room confession – we did some of the telling. Back in late 2015, almost precisely 10 years ago, we gathered what we then believed were potentially the last majestic V12s we might ever see, and took them on a roadtrip. There was the Lamborghini Aventador, the Aston Martin Vanquish and the Ferrari F12 and off we went to Scotland and when we came back Sam Philip wrote sentences like this" "... I fear we'll look back on these as the last days of the huge engined, naturally aspirated supercar... emissions regulations are close to rendering the big, free breathing V12 extinct", and "I'd put a shiny pound on the Aventador being [Lambo's] last turbo free V12".

It was a more innocent time (although I'm not above getting Sam to pay up). But here we are, almost exactly a decade down the line from our doom mongering, with the exact successors of those three cars gathered again and each and every one still has a 12 banger under the hood. Ferrari is so buoyant about the whole thing it slapped the fact on the badge. *Vai a quel paese*, fun police.

> “FOR V12 LONGEVITY, LOOK NO FURTHER THAN ASTON”

But (as you might already have realised) Sam wasn’t actually that far off the mark. Only one of these three still retains the purity of natural aspiration. The Ferrari. And as we’ll come on to discover, its 6,496cc, 65°, 9,500rpm F140 motor – that traces its roots back to the Enzo and is now well over 20 years old – is also the best engine here.

The opposition has had to capitulate, Aston with turbos, Lambo with electric motors. I know, right. Lambo/electric, that’s a pair that’ll work together as effortlessly as Trump and Musk, but I’d rather retain the V12 and add electric than do an SF90... Thing is, to make the V12 fit for electrical partnership, it had to be modified. The L539 had been a new engine for the Aventador in 2011, but now the 6,498cc, 60°, 9,500rpm L545 has been spun through 180°, lightened and fettled.

For V12 longevity, look no further than Aston. The same basic motor has been in service since the DB7 V12 Vantage in 1999. It’s done the lot for Aston over the years, was turbocharged in 2016 for the DB11 and now develops pretty much twice the horsepower it did back then – and it’s the power gains that electric and turbos provide that have reshaped the V12 landscape most. Back in Scotland the 730bhp Ferrari was the most potent, now, with 819bhp, it’s the least. Across the decade it’s gained just 90bhp while the Aston has packed on 259bhp and the Lamborghini 311bhp.

But should the Revuelto be here at all? Mid engined and 4WD it’s clearly the sharp nosed joker in the pack, handed an advantage before the wheels have even started turning. It’s a supercar, the others are super GTs, so when we stage a drag race, the result is the foregone conclusion we anticipate. The Lamborghini sods off into the distance. But that wasn’t the battle here. I’m in the Ferrari and convinced I’m going to thrash the Aston. Better traction control, better torque management and let’s hope a quarter mile isn’t enough for the Aston’s 200lb ft torque advantage to tell. But it’s the other way round – the Aston’s faster off the line than I expect, but from there on the advantage is with the 200kg lighter Ferrari.

But we didn’t do the drag race to discover the fastest, we just wanted to see if 36 cylinders sound better than 12. Turns out they do. Because the best things aren’t overthought, and a main straight ripped apart first by the contralto Revuelto’s dirty, naughty thrash, pursued by the higher, purer, more musical Ferrari and then rounded off by the thunderous Vanquish, well, it’s a place to be.

All of these cars have more power than they can deal with, but none makes it more challenging for the driver than the Ferrari. This has nothing to do with the powertrain, everything to do with how excitable the chassis is when pushed. But this monster of a V12 remains the world’s greatest powerplant. The throttle response is peerless, the big capacity means oodles of instant torque, it’s a complete aristocrat of a V12, immaculately mannered, cultured and smooth, yet yelpingly unhinged as it homes in on 9,500rpm. The Lambo runs it close, but the Ferrari’s purity and clarity are unmatched. Yet matched by the equally masterful gearbox and brakes. Yep, going and stopping are the Dodici highlights.

It’s what happens between that’s not quite there, because the chassis seems to be resting on its laurels. We’re used to Ferraris being a bit edgy due to their sharp, direct steering and active rear steer, but the issue here is that at track speeds the body control isn’t good enough. You try to be smooth with your inputs, but the Dodici insists on magnifying every input. It makes the car feel alert and vivid – but arguably too alert and vivid seeing as it gave me the biggest moment of the whole test when it started to oversteer at the exit of the superfast last corner when I thought it was all hooked up.

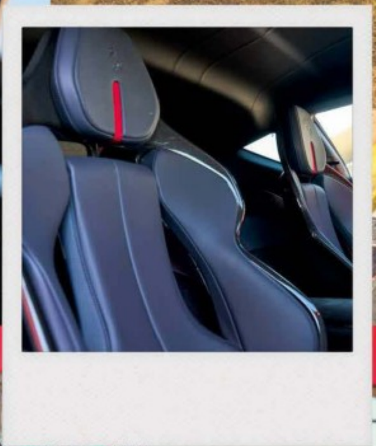
Try to go fast in the Dodici and, to put it mildly, it’s a bit of a handful, oversteering everywhere with the back end behaving like the fat tyres have been swapped out for a pair of casters. And we’d be OK with that if it felt like the damping had your back, that you had full confidence in the Dodici, but I found myself wishing it would calm down a bit, that the suspension would settle and smooth out.

The lack of body control, a certain numbness in the feedback, used to be an Aston issue, but this new generation of cars, that started with the DB12 three years back and then gave us the two seat Vantage that was a bit of a hero at PCOTY last year, and now this Vanquish, has really moved the game on.

The back axles used to squirm under the torque onslaught, compressing awkwardly and buckling if bumps were involved. Progress could be turbulent. But the moment the Vanquish starts to squat and accelerate you feel the tautness, a direct connection between throttle and rear wheels. It’s really well supported, so you feel happier using more of the engine. I thoroughly enjoy punting the Vanquish around Portimão. It’s not as much of a charger as the Ferrari. The steering isn’t as hyperactive, the noise is toned down, it’s heavier and less agile and its automatic gearbox is far too slow at shifting down into second for the tighter turns. But overall I find the Aston not just less intimidating than the Ferrari, but more satisfying.

Much of this is down to the engine. It’s not that it sounds as good as the Ferrari or responds anything like as well, because it doesn’t – and in fact turbo lag is an issue if the revs drop below 3,500rpm – but the torque is almost bottomless, giving the Vanquish a sense of

Either the Aston's engine's let go, or somebody's used more than quarter throttle



Now go and watch the video on *topgear.com*

Head to YouTube to see the drag race. Spoiler: this wasn't the finishing order

ESC SPORT
P
0
km/h
0
MPH
RICARICA x10
RPM x1000
E - POTENZA x10
HYBRID

Looks like the Ferrari's engine is running away from the front end design

“ALL THESE CARS HAVE MORE PO

If you can figure out how this lot all works, let us know

A million miles from the ergonomic disaster big Lambos of old

ASTON MARTIN
UK V12 AML

VER THAN THEY CAN DEAL WITH’’

Smells of rich mahogany and leather bound books in here

CT 959AH
V12 AML
Lamborghini

Full marks to Lambo for putting its V12 on permanent display

V12 AML
CT 959AH

weightless acceleration. The sheer amount of thrust on offer through the long travel throttle is epic, an ever expanding force.

The Aston is a simple car, easily understood. The Revuelto is thunderously complex. Three electric motors partner the V12, there's a battery and the steering wheel is swathed in more buttons, knobs and controls than a DJ's mixing deck. But you'll spend more time figuring out what mode you want to be in than what sort of car the Revuelto is. That comes to you in an instant – it's the best kind, a supercar that wants to have fun and knows how to play.

Let me caveat that early – it's not a drift machine, but this is a car that knows what it is and what it's for brilliantly well. And if you just tickle the surface it's the same old Lambo. Noise, drama, garish visuals and an inability to pipe down and go quietly about the place. Even in EV mode. What's new and welcome is a level of handling nous, balance, chassis composure and control that we've very rarely seen. Sat low in that slender wedge of a cabin, with the windscreen stretching out beyond your toes, being hurled around Portimão by 1,001bhp, yet feeling confident and looked after despite the outward chaos and drama, well, that's pretty special.

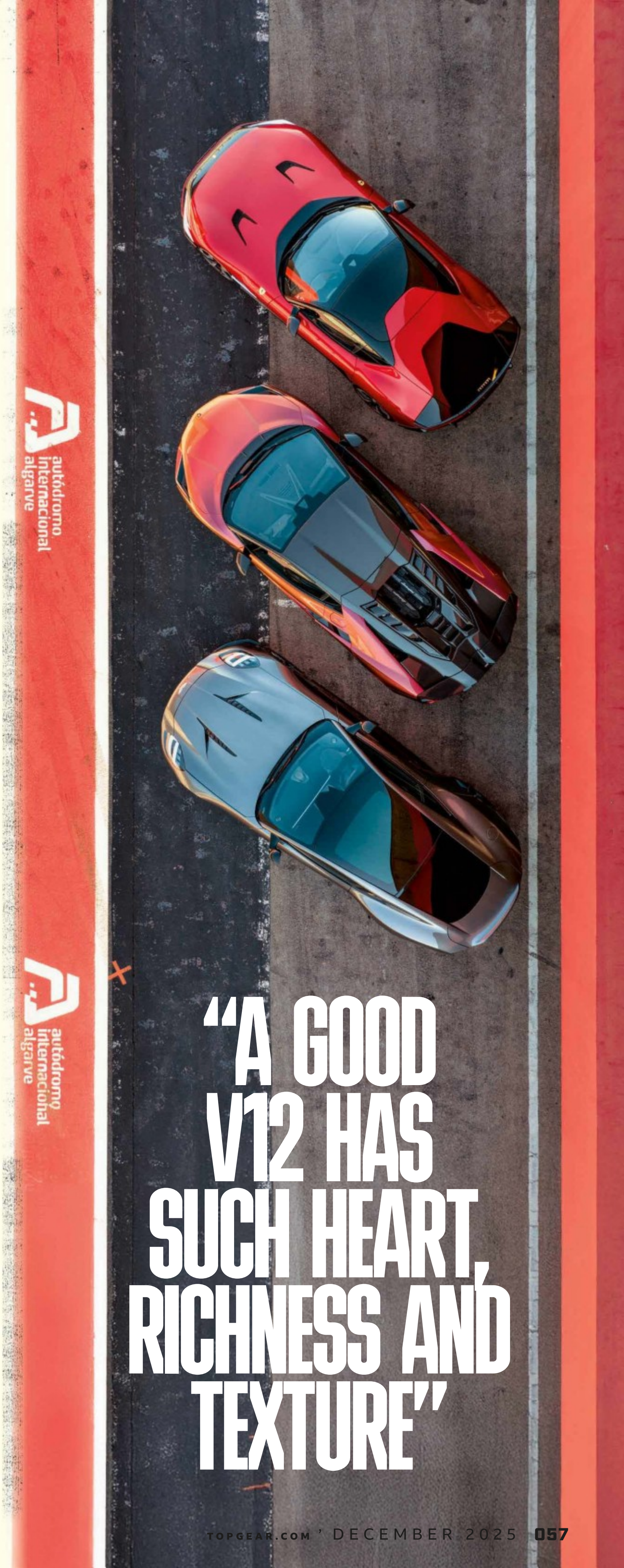
At the start I joked about just getting the Lambo round the rest of the circuit so I could lamp it down the main straight again. The truth is the rest of the circuit is the best bit.

Two things to mention. All three cars are greatly enhanced by having a V12, which means that reports of its demise have been greatly exaggerated. *Mea culpa*. A good V12 has such heart, such richness and texture that it feels creamy and yet has bite, is supremely cultured and yet makes every hair prickle. Forget the power figures, they are the ultimate experience engines.

I mean imagine any of these with a turbo V8 or V6 instead. Aston has other, similar cars packing V8s, and they're very, very good. But the Vanquish is special. Look at the Revuelto. Now imagine it had a turbo V8. That's not right is it? This is a triumphant, majestic car and it demands a V12. I can't see a single reason why you'd have a Ferrari SF90 when the Revuelto is here. With a V12. And bootspace.

Ferrari needs to use its V12 in more places. It's a transcendental motor, and in the future will rightly be remembered and celebrated. But the Dodici in which it's mounted fails to move the game on in other areas against opposition that genuinely has.

The sales figures might not yet be as pretty as the Vanquish's bodywork, and it's a more demure car than the others here, but the masterful flagship Aston has not only pomp and presence, it's connected and engaging in exactly the way you want it to be, with just enough of a roguish edge. Our winner on track, however, is the Revuelto. You think it's just going to be another arm waving enthusiast, as histrionic as its shape, but discover it has genuine depth and nuance, and a chassis that can keep pace with its engine. For as long as you dare keep it pinned.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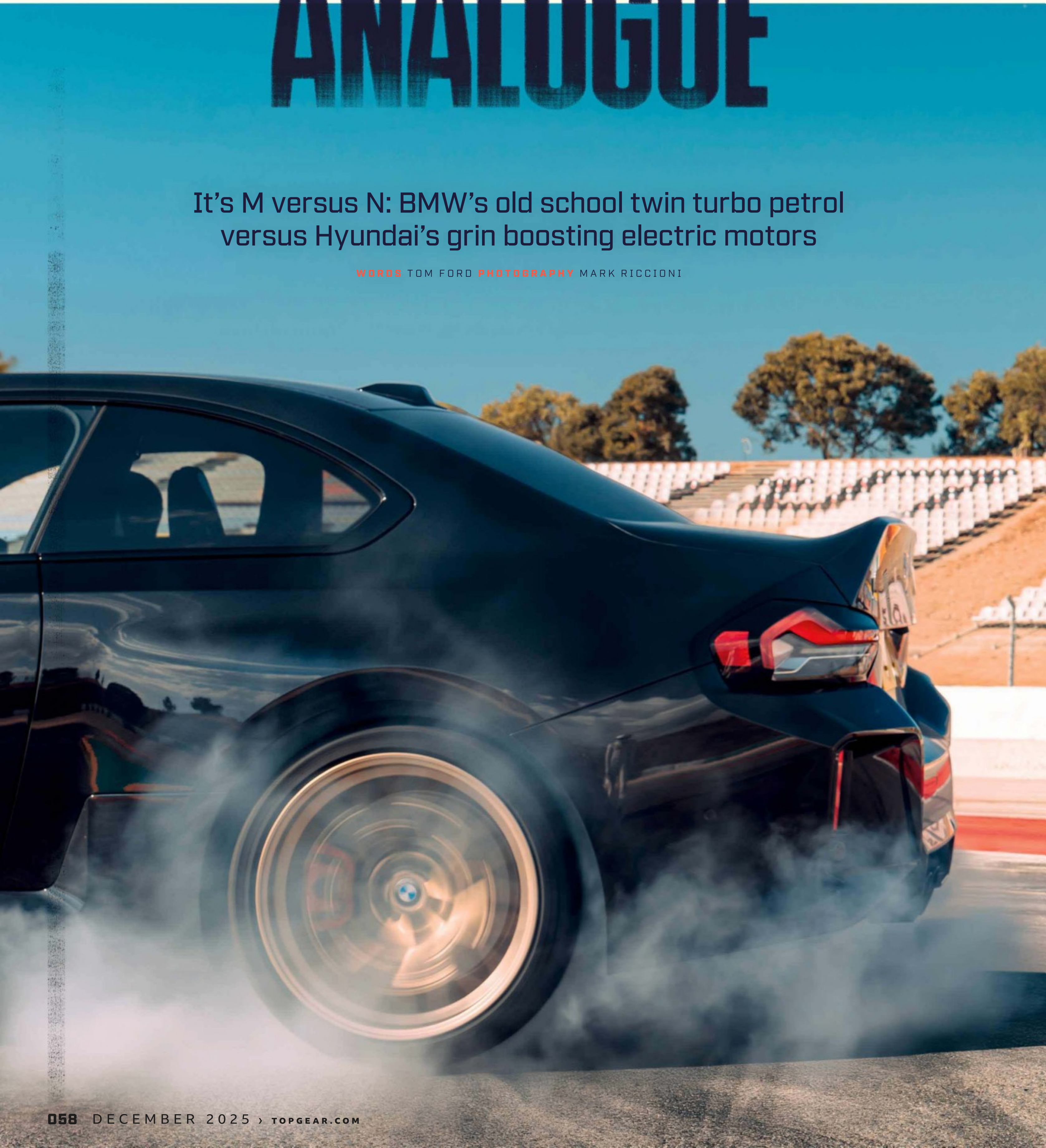
"A GOOD V12 HAS SUCH HEART, RICHNESS AND TEXTURE"

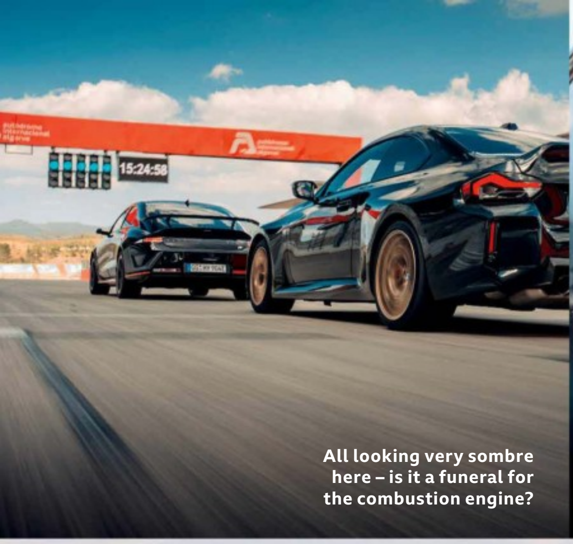
ANALOGUE



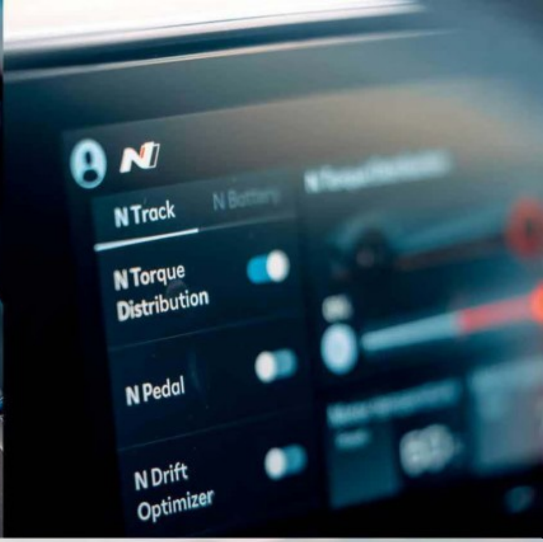
It's M versus N: BMW's old school twin turbo petrol versus Hyundai's grin boosting electric motors

WORDS TOM FORD **PHOTOGRAPHY** MARK RICCIONI

vs DIGITAL



All looking very sombre here – is it a funeral for the combustion engine?


N Track
N Battery
N Torque Distribution
N Pedal
N Drift Optimizer

GG HY 904E
YH75 AHC

Tom's getting range anxiety – not the batteries, the gap to the car in front

MINIATURE EXPLOSIONS VERSUS BOTTLED LIGHTNING. Valvetrains and cogs pitted against copper windings and code, barbecue versus microwave. Piano versus synthesiser. However you want to frame it, modern performance cars are changing. Have already changed – manuals are rare, sophisticated traction and stability controls ubiquitous. And engines are optional.

Some things are the same though, and track driving when you don't really know the circuit is still a shell game of memory and nerve, no matter if you're in a new, resolutely petrol powered BMW M2 CS or an equally box fresh Hyundai Ioniq 6 N. But I've got it now. I think. Aim for the third light post as the car lollops over the rise, zero *g* stomach as you

Now go and watch the video on *topgear.com*

“That’s enough about your coconuts, what’s the car like?”

unweight the suspension into the big dip, rollercoastering over the top and setting up for the big uphill left. It’s a trust fall into the sticky arms of the Cup 2 R tyres as the right hand side of the car loads up… wait and wait as the power pulls you up and over the next crest, pull fourth if you’re feeling brave and then brake and snatch third. The car pops and bangs on the lift, a grumbly multicylinder noise ejected from the back of the car like chaff from a fighter plane. The right that comes next is tricky – there are two apexes and we manage to hit no less than four before mashing the throttle and feeling the back end swing wide in a very rear wheel drive fashion, a quick stutter of the rev limiter and we’re off to the rest of the lap and the pitlane to swap cars.

Into the BMW.

Ah yes. Hyundai’s electric ‘N’ cars are busy subverting the stereotypes, while BMW is mining a traditional seam of performance. But if you’re expecting to hear that the petrol powered BMW M2 CS and the electric Hyundai Ioniq 6 N are night and day different, you’d be wrong. And the duel is fascinating.

On the one hand, you’ve got the M2 CS. A 3.0-litre, twin turbo petrol coupe that feels about the same size as an old M3. It’s stubby, blocky and inelegant. But also purposeful and powerful – that’s 523bhp and 479lb ft stuffed in there, powering just the rear wheels via an eight speed paddle box – there is no manual option. It does 0–62mph in 3.8secs and 188mph top end, the ‘CS’ bit of the badge offering more power, more focused track settings, 8mm lower suspension than standard and lots of bodywork changes including a whacking great ducktail bootlid. There are optional carbon ceramic brakes, different splitters and much carbon fibre, including the roof, and it weighs 30kg less than a standard M2. Although at 1,700kg at the kerb, it’s not exactly flimsy.

Then there’s the Ioniq 6 N. A dual motored electric saloon with four doors and all wheel drive, a possible 641bhp, 0–62 in 3.2 seconds and 160mph top speed, endlessly configurable settings and various aero aids including a whopping gooseneck rear spoiler. The Ioniq is just as much of a visual problem child, the front being sharp and deliberate, the rear looking like it’s slumped slightly in the sunshine.

And there's more power yes, but also more mass. With that gutful of lithium, the Hyundai weighs over two tonnes – some 500kg more than the already portly M2 – and when it comes to slice 'n' dice track reactions, fatness is a fairly immutable disadvantage. But if physics has dealt you lousy cards, there's nothing to do but play them. Unless you cheat.

Which the 6 N does quite stylishly. Following on from the hatchback 5 N, the 6 N takes the essentials of the drivetrain and transplants them into a longer wheelbase with a wider track. So you've got a 230ish bhp front motor and a 400+ rear that produces about 600bhp in normal running, with a 40bhp 'N Grin Boost' shot of digital nitrous for overtakes. You can play with the delivery of the drivetrain to be either more front or rear wheel drive, but you'll rob power – 100 per cent rear wheel drive? You're running just on the 406bhp rear motor. If 100 per cent front wheel drive, you're just getting 235, and the percentages shimmy to fit the setting. There's new suspension geometry versus the standard car, new 'stroke sensing' electronic damping and a faked gearbox that runs through

> **"THE IONIQ IS JUST AS MUCH OF A VISUAL PROBLEM CHILD AS THE BMW"**

“THE 6 N IS A HELL OF A ROAD CAR FOR £70K”

Hyundai looks like it’s been left next to a radiator. Best served chilled

No manual in the CS, but a huge number of modes and settings to play with

Completely baffling to operate at first, makes sense after a few hours

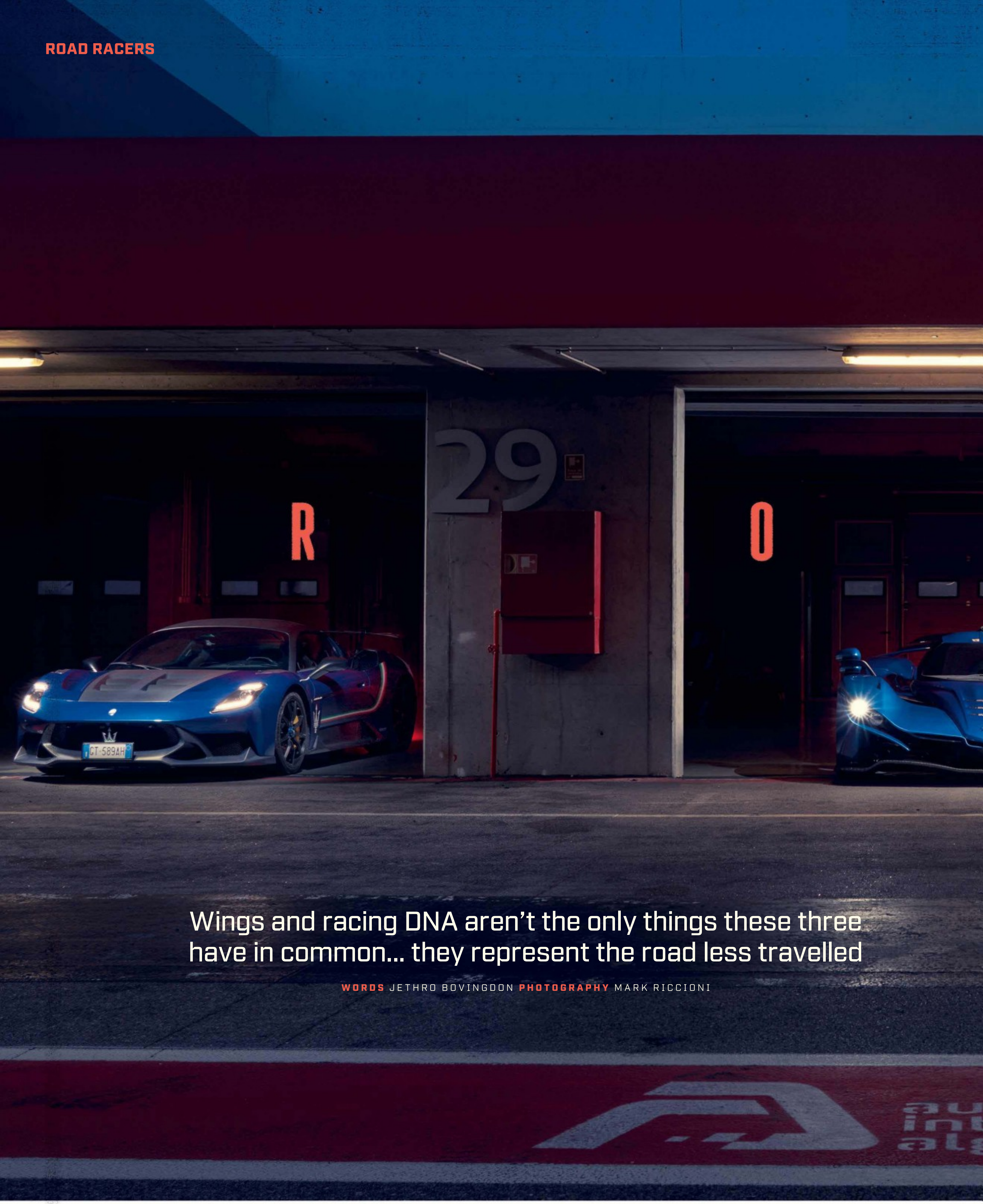
the paddles behind the wheel, which also control the regen braking if you're in a less aggressive mode. You can hit a 'rev limiter' which actually arrests forward motion, makes the various chintzy shift lights dance. And it'll make noise – from a V8 grumble to a science fiction swoosh. All fake. Or at least not real. A CGI performance car. There's a lot to take in when you first start to play with the 6 N's various modes and workarounds, but there are also two big 'N' shortcut buttons on the steering wheel that save your two favourite setups. So this is a car that requires a little bit of intellectual investment to sort it out and then after that, it's pretty straightforward.

It's also really good fun. And desperately fast. But the BMW is also remarkably quick – and it's coming from a more familiar place. In fact, the BMW is a very serious feeling car. From the comically thick steering wheel to the way that it sits on a road, the M2 CS feels staunchly committed. On the optional track tyres it's hard to break loose and play with – push it past its immense operating window and you'll lose flesh to a scathing side eye. You need to be precise, controlled and effective – like the car. If you are, you'll discover front end grip that's almost supernatural, steering that's sharp enough to slice fingertips and grip that'll bruise kidneys with direction changes. The eight speed box is digital quick and just as effective, the noise something of a disappointment. The Hyundai may be generating 'N Active Sound', but the BMW has ASD (Active Sound Design) piping synthesised engine noise in through the speaker system, so if we're talking about fakery, everyone's at it.

But the BMW has the more precise steering and better brakes – endlessly consistent and powerful – with excellent feel from big, scary speeds. It feels lighter and settles faster after direction changes. The Hyundai makes the outside front tyre work harder – that's the weight of an 84kWh battery making itself known, no matter how low in the chassis it rides – but it's also more playful, and a bit easier on the nerves. Stick it in AWD and it's basically a point and shoot – pitch it in on the cusp of the inevitable understeer, see the apex and floor it. It'll *go*. Want to drift? Just make it all rear wheel drive and hang on – you'll soon forget the 'electric' part. Weirdly, the Ioniq N actually adds in the burrs and rough edges that make the car feel less digital, while the M2 CS seems hellbent on making the car so efficient at annihilating the stopwatch that it's lost some of the fun.

Bluntly, the Hyundai is the quirkier of the two, the CS the faster. The M2 feels very serious, zealous and slightly joyless. As if the commitment to a fast lap time has robbed the car of some of the BMW fluidity. It's damnably effective on the optional super sticky track tyres, but what point are we proving? That it's the fastest 3.0-litre coupe? A dedicated track car would be more fun, for a lot less money than the CS's £86,800 asking price – and you'd take a few more scalps. It's amazing what BMW has managed here, but there's a lack of accessible excitement that makes it a go to. Interestingly, it was far better on the road with road biased tyres and a bit less grip, even if you're still hanging on to a loop of black pudding masquerading as a steering wheel. You also can't overlook the fact that you could fuel it up easily – without a big charger on site and very fast laps chomping charge like a Labrador at an unsupervised buffet, the Ioniq was a hassle to keep motivated.

What this comes down to is what you're looking for. The M2 CS is extremely impressive on track – bonkers fast, claw on carpet grippy, ruthlessly controlled. But an M2 has a very small window of achievement in terms of lap records, so it needs to be a bit more joyful. The Ioniq 6 N is the opposite. It's also stupidly fast, but simply doesn't take itself too seriously. It's like Hyundai is trying lots of stuff to see what sticks with people who love performance driving, and some of it comes across as a bit hammy. But this stuff is going to get boiled down into electric cars that really do appeal to traditional petrolheads, and when we get batteries that weigh half as much, Hyundai's foundations will be well laid. It's also a hell of a road car for around £70k. If your first experience with an electric performance car was an electric N, I sincerely believe you'd be intrigued and hopeful. Possibly not out of the box convinced, but certainly placed in the right frame of mind to be open to the possibility. Which leaves us with only one conclusion. The better performance car here is the BMW. The car that provides the most fun? It's the Hyundai Ioniq 6 N. And that's not what we were expecting, either.



Wings and racing DNA aren't the only things these three have in common… they represent the road less travelled

WORDS JETHRO BOVINGDON **PHOTOGRAPHY** MARK RICCIONI

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These are the outliers.

THE ALTERNATIVES. AND FOR THAT, I ALREADY LOVE THEM. LIFE AT the margins of automotive enthusiasm is intriguing, highly specialised and seems gripped by our collective fever at unprecedented levels. It's also incredibly diverse and bristling with the unexpected. Of all the cars in our lineup, the appeal of the Maserati GT2 Stradale, Kimera EVO37 and Praga Bohema is the hardest to predict. The following few days could be triumph or disaster. Or, perhaps worse, a kind of 'yeah, not bad' indifference.

Or maybe all three. Wandering along the pit boxes before any car has turned a wheel, you get a tangible sense of each contender's star quality. The Maserati fades to grey. Parked just a few yards from Manthey's terrifyingly focused take on the GT3 RS, it seems halfhearted. Almost meek. The Bohema balances aggression, elegance and aerodynamic efficiency with an artful touch, but its purity is also a little intimidating. People are drawn in but quickly scared off.

The Kimera is different. It is gorgeous and tiny and endlessly, impossibly cool. When its booming four cylinder supercharged and turbocharged engine fires into life, the Ferrari mechanics tending to the 12Cilindri in the next garage burst into applause and, literally, embrace. Italians, eh? Except the Manthey guys also want to poke around it, eyes and smiles wide. Aston Martin's, too. Oh, and the M-Sport crew here to support the Raptor T1+. In fact, everyone circles the EVO37, giggles, gasps and nods in deep appreciation for a good 10 minutes. Kimera's tribute to Lancia's Group B hero is tiny in scale but has awesome impact.

Even so, the Praga Bohema is quite a spectacle as you take in its sculpted bodywork, flicks, strakes and negative space. In fact, it's genuinely beautiful and finished to an incredibly high standard. Comparisons to the Aston Valkyrie are inevitable and the Bohema doesn't need to shy away from them. If anything, the carbon fibre,

“LIFE AT THE MARGINS OF AUTOMOTIVE ENTHUSIASM IS INTRIGUING”

titanium and Inconel jewellery is a step ahead of Newey’s vision. Despite being not much more than half the price at ‘just’ £1.32m.

The Bohema is much lighter, too. Praga claims a dry weight of 982kg, which is a near 300kg advantage. However, it is a full six cylinders down. Instead of a bespoke, high revving V12 there’s the rather less exotic 3.8-litre twin turbocharged V6 from the Nissan GT-R, albeit with a dry sump setup and tune by UK based specialist Litchfield for a super reliable 700bhp. Combined with 900kg of downforce at 155mph, pushrod operated suspension, adjustable Öhlins dampers, carbon ceramic brakes, Michelin Cup 2 R tyres and a sequential Hewland box, it should be very much at home here.

Perhaps more so than a driver who first pops open the tiny butterfly door and awkwardly slithers down into the seat. There’s nothing wrong with the comfort in here, but the raised feet driving position and extreme environment are alien and intimidating. For some the Le Mans prototype vibe will be a huge part of the Praga’s appeal. For others, it will simply be too much…

It pays to stick with it. For a start, the view is stunning. The screen wraps around like a visor and there’s engineering theatre wherever you look. The almost open wheeler layout is fantastic and the wheel covers perfectly frame the track as it unfolds. It’s a tightly tailored environment, racecar style, but the materials and design flair are a world away from pure competition machinery.

The steering wheel feels so good. That sounds strange but the padding, in terms of placement and the precise squish, is noticeably different. And perfect. Flick on the ignition (located on the roof where you might find sunroof controls in a conventional car), then depress the neighbouring starter button and you’re ready. In Road mode the clutch activates automatically, but Sport, Race and Race+ require the use of a hand clutch to pull away. I elect to stay in Road until the Bohema is moving and then roll the left thumbwheel to toggle to Race as pitlane bleeds into racetrack.

The engine sounds all business and has lost the distinctive tortured wail of a GT-R, but pretty quickly the familiar V6’s immense, torquey delivery and superb throttle response feel like strengths rather than a handicap. The brake pedal feel is fantastic. Maybe a little longer in travel than you'd expect, but the unassisted system is brimming with information and offers incredible power, too. Braking distances are tiny. More remarkable is how the Bohema changes the very nature of the track. Where other cars might require a decent squeeze of the brakes, the Bohema tolerates full acceleration and an upshift. Low mass, sticky tyres and downforce make for an almost overwhelming experience.

The balance is superb. If you can find the minerals to push to the limit of Praga's spaceship you'll discover it is, after all, a car. So, it will understeer gently at first, before the rear starts to edge wide. The electronics here are a huge help, with Race mode's calibration rarely slowing progress on corner exit, but allowing you to lean on a gentle yaw angle in the heart of the turn. The Bohema might be a downforce monster, but it never feels like it's going to bite your head off.

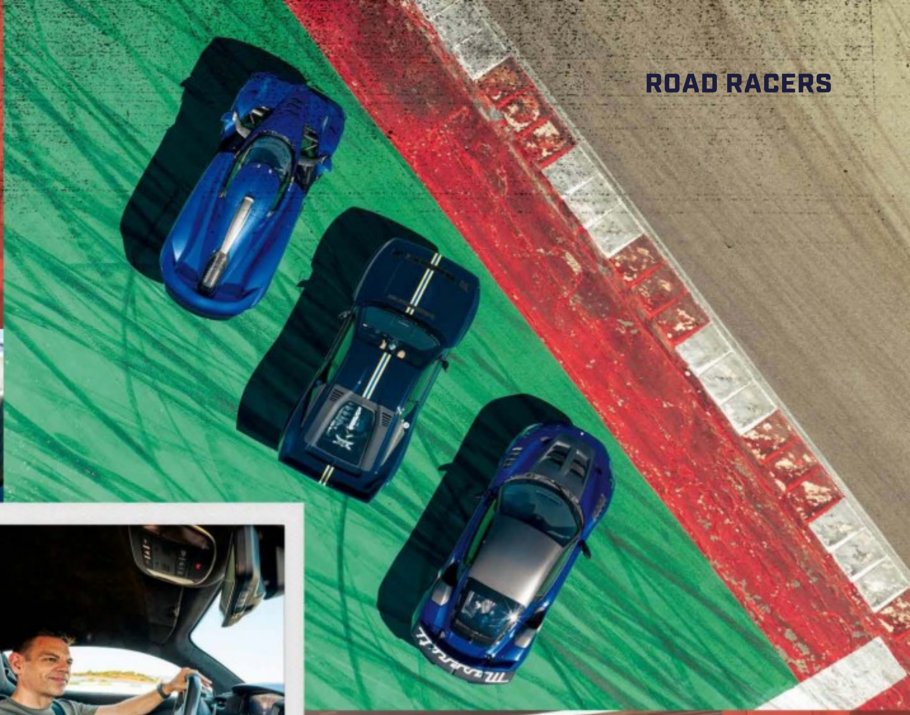
> "THERE'S ENGINEERING THEATRE WHEREVER YOU LOOK"

Bad stuff? Not much. The gearbox is fast and mostly smooth. A match for the Valkyrie, for example. But it's not savagely fast and exciting like the best dual clutch transmissions. The engine is strong and sounds pleasingly industrial, but there isn't quite the unhinged, all powerful feeling that I've experienced in tuned GT-R engines in the past. I think they need to dial up the character here. Inject some Group C madness, maybe. And the steering is fast and accurate but as speeds rise it doesn't seem to get pinned by the aero and increase in positivity. Instead, the system starts to seem slightly more remote and so high speed corners are a matter of faith rather than natural confidence.

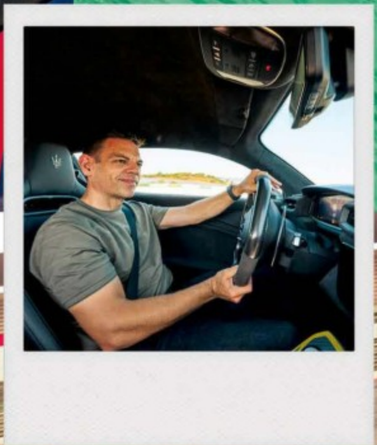
Maserati's GT2 Stradale might appear tame in comparison but, for me, it's tantalising. The MC20 on which it's based is polarising, but I love its juxtaposition of gruff, boosty twin turbocharged V6 and supple, super fluid chassis. It's a rare groove, slightly bonkers whole that fits Maserati's operatic history to perfection. A harder, faster version does run the risk of feeling too conventional and rushing into a head to head with the likes of McLaren's 750S and Ferrari's 296 GTB, but it might just throw up some magic, too.

The formula is as you'd expect. A smidge more power (up to 631bhp), more aggressive springs and dampers, radically revised aero including a pass through style bonnet, vented front wings, a much bigger diffuser and fixed rear wing, plus reprogrammed stability control programme, faster gearshifts and bigger brakes. Mass has also been cut and the interior manages to feel stripped out yet bespoke. This car isn't fitted with the carbon fibre bucket seats, which seems a strange omission, but otherwise the GT2 exudes just the right amount of road racer swagger.

Praga
Praga



We've not seen scoops this big since that *gelateria* in Florence



Praga
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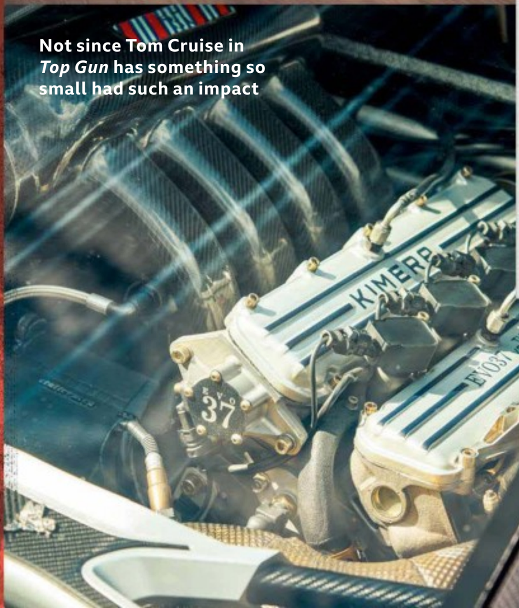
The Praga will scare small children and animals… fine by us

Not since Tom Cruise in *Top Gun* has something so small had such an impact



“THE LE MANS PROTOTYPE VIBE IS A HUGE PART OF THE PRAGA’S APPEAL”

It takes just a lap to know the Maser has some incredible dynamic qualities… but some perplexing missteps. The handling balance is fantastic. The GT2 feels sharp but natural, has extremely strong grip and traction but also delivers the MC20’s smooth, fluid road manners directly to the racetrack. The core feeling is the same, only with amplified control and *g* loadings. It’s extremely alert but never hurried or nervous and really does seed huge confidence in the driver.

‘Natural’ really is the key word here. So, why the contrived thump for upshifts? It’s an odd choice for a car that seems to be fundamentally excellent and requires no such synthesised ‘character’ to be applied. Lap two reveals the sheer depth of composure and the GT2’s almost spooky ability to resist wheelspin. In Corsa mode you can play between four preset stability control programmes, but pretty soon you realise that a dry track means no assistance is required. The GT2 just hooks up and should it start to slide at front or rear, the angles are small and build with easy progression.

But by the third lap the temperatures are climbing quickly towards the red. The brakes – which feel oddly unresponsive even when in their comfort zone – are starting to fade and the impeccable chassis balance is undermined. The GT2 Stradale is a really cool thing and highly effective. But, it needs more stamina, greater consistency and for every dynamic element to level up to the clean, precise chassis. Until then it will be a case of what might have been.

Which brings us rather neatly to the £750,000 Kimera EVO37. The creative process behind this car is simple but inspired. In look and configuration it’s pure Lancia 037 – the mid-engined, Group B wonder developed and produced by Abarth in collaboration with Pininfarina and Dallara that somehow managed to deliver the 1983 WRC constructors’ title to Lancia against the onslaught of the new Audi Quattro. It would be the last rear drive car to do so.

Some starting point, right? But this car isn’t a slavish copy. Instead, Kimera pondered how the 037 might have evolved if Lancia hadn’t gone down the four wheel drive Delta S4 route for its next

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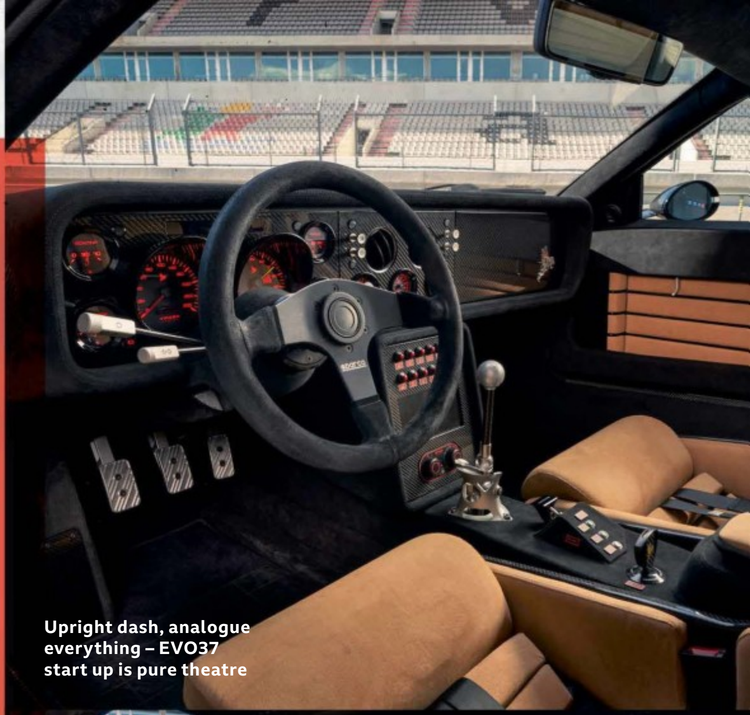
evoluzione

Now go and watch the video on *topgear.com*

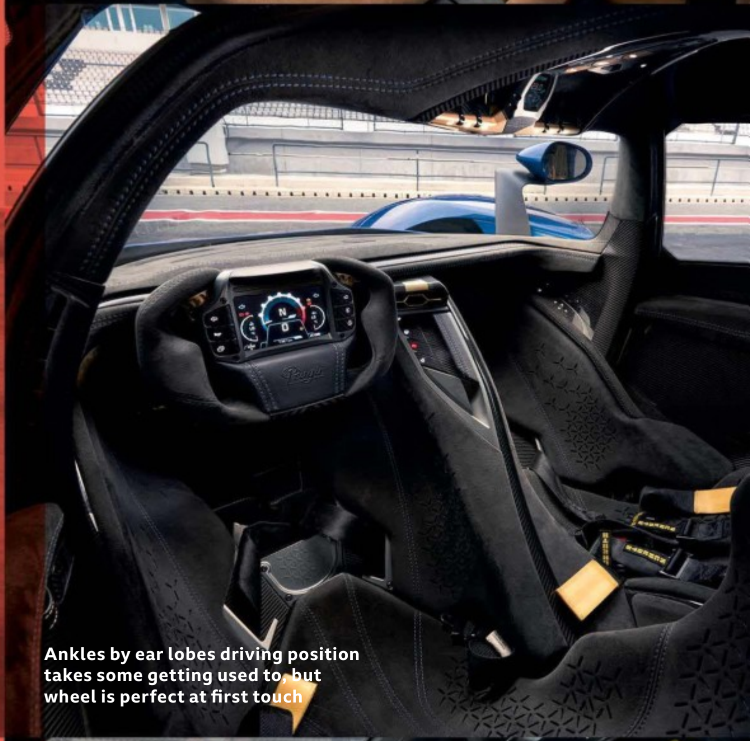
WRC challenger. So, the EVO37 adopts Delta S4 technical solutions (plus jaw dropping craftsmanship that is very un-1980s era Lancia) and implants them into that tiny, lightweight sports car platform so beloved of drivers like Walter Röhrl.

Just like the original car the EVO37's central tub is from a Lancia Montecarlo. The rest is pure competition – double wishbone suspension, twin dampers per corner at the rear and the most breathtaking carbon fibre bodywork. The engine is the party piece. The 037 ran a 2.1-litre supercharged engine in 1983, but Kimera applies the S4's 'twin charge' philosophy. So, four cylinders but a supercharger for low rev response and a big old turbo for top end fireworks. The supercharger is decoupled from the engine via an electric clutch to stop the parasitic losses at 4,200rpm. Three engine maps give 300bhp, 400bhp or 505bhp. We go for map three, obviously.

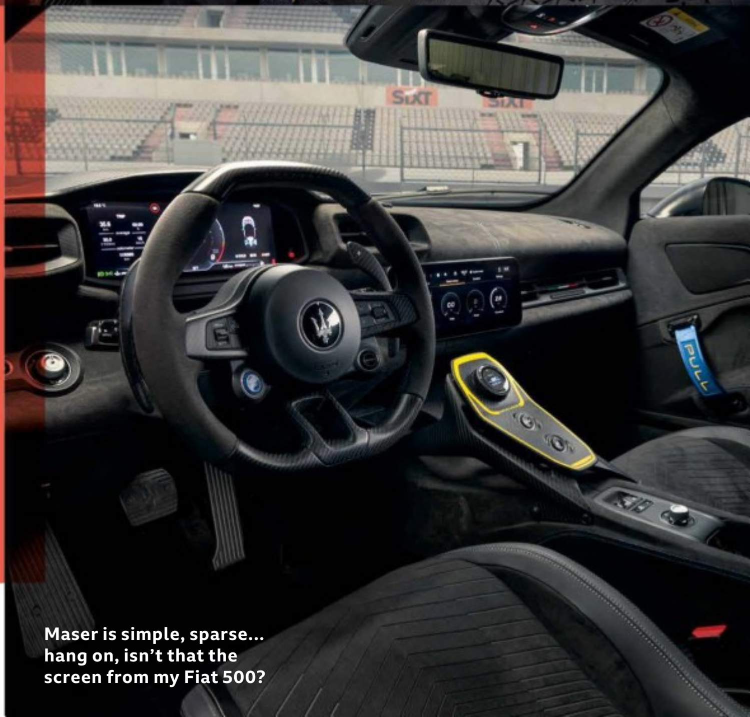
Where to begin? The Kimera EVO37 is rally derived and has body roll, pitch and dive well beyond, say, the GT2 Stradale. However, because it's small and light the movements are controlled and they



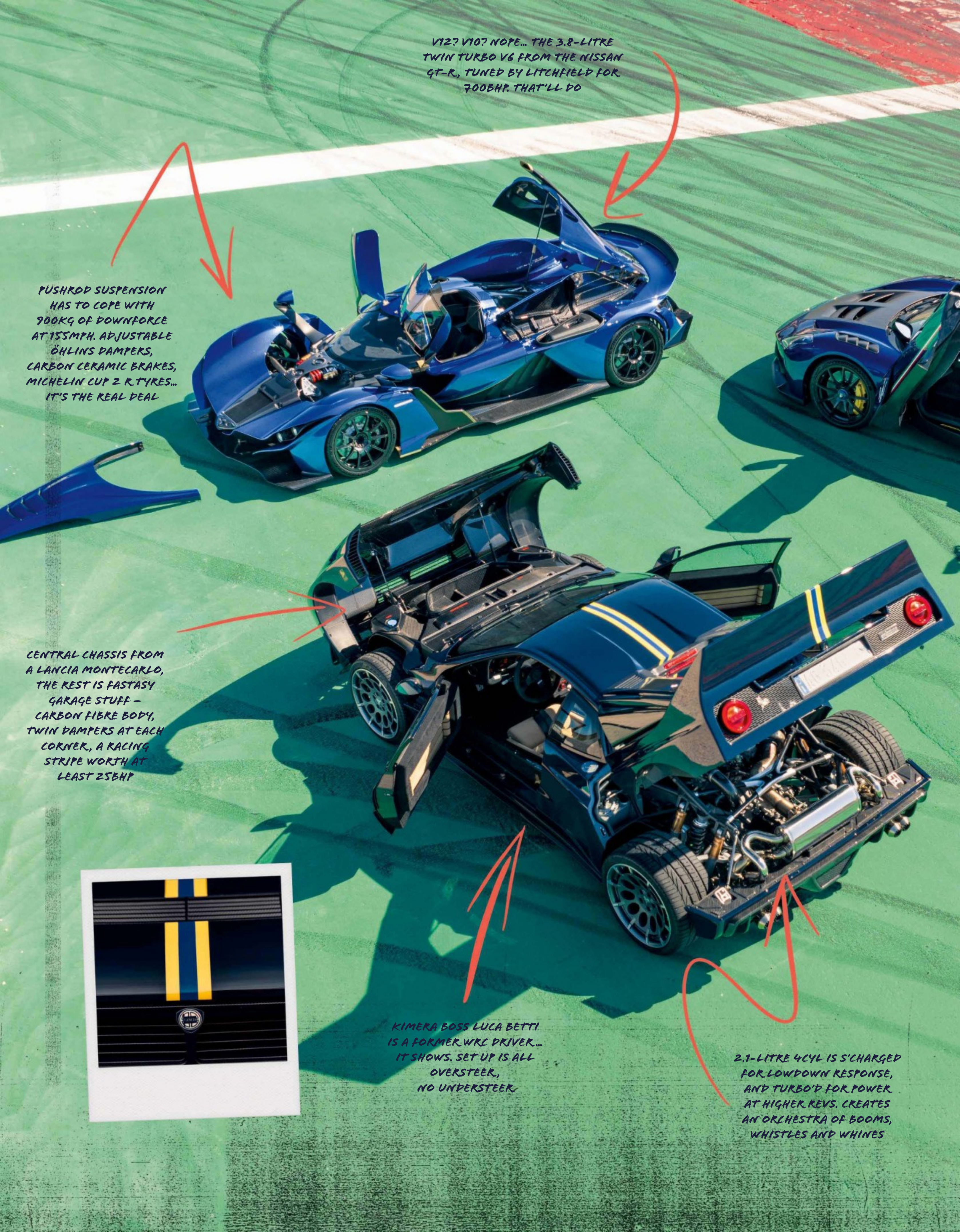
Upright dash, analogue everything – EVO37 start up is pure theatre



Ankles by ear lobes driving position takes some getting used to, but wheel is perfect at first touch



Maser is simple, sparse... hang on, isn't that the screen from my Fiat 500?



V12? V10? NOPE… THE 3.8-LITRE TWIN TURBO V6 FROM THE NISSAN GT-R, TUNED BY LITCHFIELD FOR 700BHP. THAT'LL DO

PUSHROD SUSPENSION HAS TO COPE WITH 900KG OF DOWNFORCE AT 155MPH. ADJUSTABLE ÖHLINS DAMPERS, CARBON CERAMIC BRAKES, MICHELIN CUP 2 R TYRES… IT'S THE REAL DEAL

CENTRAL CHASSIS FROM A LANCIA MONTECARLO, THE REST IS FASTASY GARAGE STUFF – CARBON FIBRE BODY, TWIN DAMPERS AT EACH CORNER., A RACING STRIPE WORTH AT LEAST 25BHP

KIMERA BOSS LUCA BETTI IS A FORMER WRC DRIVER… IT SHOWS. SET UP IS ALL OVERSTEER, NO UNDERSTEER

2.1-LITRE 4CYL IS S'CHARGED FOR LOWDOWN RESPONSE, AND TURBO'D FOR POWER AT HIGHER REVS. CREATES AN ORCHESTRA OF BOOMS, WHISTLES AND WHINES

3.0-LITRE TWIN TURBO NETTUNO V6 NOW UP TO 631BHP... DOESN'T SOUND LIKE A LOT, BUT STILL PUNCHES LIKE – PRIME ROCKY BALBOA

> "THE EVO37 HAS A DEPTH OF POLISH TO SHAME MANY OEM EFFORTS"

engender so much feel. Few cars possess such fluidity. Fewer still can combine freedom of expression with composure and a capacity to keep rolling with the punches. The 037's freakish agility on the stage, and its ability to soak up endless direction changes, yumps and ragged surfaces, lives on in the EVO37. The Kimera simply flows.

All is not calm and serene, though. The engine is a snorting beast of a thing that spews flames and malevolence. It's just so angry and ugly and beautiful. There's no musicality and yet you want the noise to rattle your organs and flood every sense. It helps that it's hooked up to the fabulous six speed manual gearbox used in the Audi R8. The shift is mechanical and sweet with just enough grit to feel authentic. Every dynamic detail marries perfectly with the next.

The EVO37 is the product of a tiny team with limited resources but it has a depth of polish to shame many OEM efforts. You can feel the passion that's been poured into this project and the innate understanding that this highly evolved 037 is not an ornament to polish and display. It's beautiful in detail, yes. But its magic is fully revealed when you roll up your sleeves and get stuck in to really driving it. Kimera's founder is former WRC driver Luca Betti. You can tell he's driven this thing at full pace for thousands of miles.

Then it broke down. That's what you're thinking, right? Sorry to disappoint but the Kimera never even dropped a hint that it might. I'd guess this car did more laps than any other contender bar the GT3 RS MR. It was driven sideways and beasted over kerbs. It kissed the rev limiter countless times. Yet the EVO37 shrugged it all off.

After three solid days of lapping, the brakes (now fitted with ABS and supplemented by a traction control system) felt well used but didn't vibrate or suffer from any loss of power. Weak links? We didn't find any. This thing is legit. In all the ways. From the lovely, light and calm steering to the exquisite balance and the sheer exuberance of that wild engine, Kimera has built a world class, unforgettable and irrepressible machine. This is not a restomod. It's the living, fire breathing embodiment of everything we love about cars. The Lancia 037 beat the Audi Quattro in 1983 against all the odds. Who's to say the Kimera EVO37 can't defeat Ferrari, Porsche, BMW, Aston Martin and Lamborghini in 2025? It makes the final five. Easily.

DOUBLE VISION

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911 GT3 used to mean one thing – now it stretches from a slippery 'Touring' with a manual box and back seats... to a racecar with numberplates

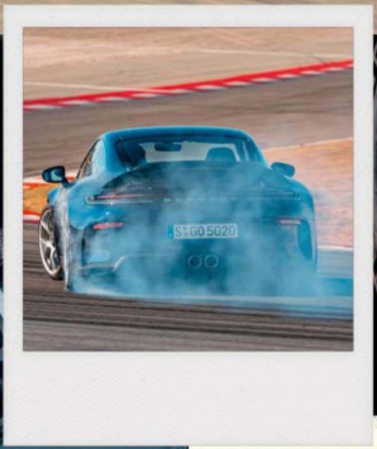
WORDS ROWAN HORNCASTLE **PHOTOGRAPHY** MARK RICCIONI

PCOTY 2025

And that was the last Rowan saw of it for the next five laps

Big downforce and sticky tyres are no match for Stig's lack of mechanical sympathy

WEISSACH RS



PORSCHE
MANTHEY
MICHELIN

IF THERE'S ONE PLACE YOU CAN COME TO UNDERSTAND Porsche's split personality, it's here – standing in the paddock at Portimão. Rattling away with their distinct, slightly uneven, cammy lope in the hot sun are two cars that share a badge and little else. Both blue. Both stuffed with the same 4.0-litre naturally aspirated flat six engine. Both 911s. And yet as far apart as two cars can be. This is extremity defined in either direction – the GT3 Touring, subtle and stripped back, versus the Manthey GT3 RS, for all intents and purposes, a Cup car that's wearing a numberplate.

The Manthey is a car so extreme you wonder if the people who homologated it were drunk, bribed or both. The base 992 GT3 RS was already Porsche's most outrageous road car. But Manthey – the 'Ring specialist that's won the 24 hour race there seven times, and Porsche's newly acquired black ops division of speed – looked at it and decided it wasn't enough. Two years of development, wind tunnels, many miles of endurance running, and what emerged is a car that bends the boundaries, yet still sits within TÜV legality.

Here was the problem – it had to make the car faster, but wasn't allowed to touch the engine. Emissions, aero, power were all fixed. And it couldn't strip any more weight, because the RS had already been pared to the bone. So Manthey went down the creative route. One aerodynamicist, barely in his 20s, sketched carbon shark fins. Others bolted on extra roof strakes, wheelhouse gurneys, aero discs. Radical, daring stuff, the kind of ideas Porsche Motorsport might once have dismissed. In fact, nothing captures the madness better than the front splitter story.

On racecars, a splitter this long is usually braced with steel ropes. But steel ropes fail pedestrian safety tests. So Manthey invented carbon tubes with a spring built in. Push from one side and the splitter flexes 15mm upwards, soft enough for TÜV approval. Push from the other and it's stiff enough to bear the aero load. A tiny, obsessive detail. A migraine inducing problem solved with ridiculous ingenuity.

At the other end of the spectrum, the 992.2 Touring is the most usable GT3 ever. It retains a clean 911 silhouette, just with an active rear spoiler hiding in plain sight. Yet beneath the subtle suit is the sharpest, most considered GT3 road car to date – and also the most practical. This is the first GT3 you can spec with rear seats, which sounds like heresy until you imagine a child whooping louder than the engine in the back, and suddenly it makes sense. Even within this model you can diversify as the Leichtbau package pulls weight from every corner – magnesium wheels, a lighter lithium-ion battery, CFRP anti-roll bars – and adds the shortened gear lever from the 911 S/T, but thankfully not its capricious clutch.

Portimão is the perfect setting. It feels less like a racetrack and more like a topographical prank. Blind crests, plunging drops, rollercoaster gradients that leave your stomach in your shoes. The Touring is less about raw numbers – 3.9secs to 62mph, 194mph flat out – and more about sensation. The 992.2 adds back some of the

“BOTH 911s, YET AS FAR APART AS TWO CARS CAN BE”

"THE MANTHEY CAN FLATTER AMATEURS AS WELL AS INDULGE PROS"

mechanical clatter of GT3s of old, but it all remains analogue in the ways that matter. The addictive nat-asp 4.0-litre flat six refuses to bow to the age of turbos and hybrids – 503bhp, revving to 9,000rpm, with you stirring the gears and working for your supper. A good recipe.

Around the lap you use the weight in the rear like a pendulum – trail brake, rotate the car, then stand on the throttle and let it sling you out with rear engine traction. When it works, you feel brilliant. When it doesn't, there's no aero safety net to save you. It has the classic 911 characteristics and every upshift is an event, heel and toe downshifts a moment. Unlike a lot of modern cars, driving it you feel like you're part of a mechanical conversation rather than an algorithm.

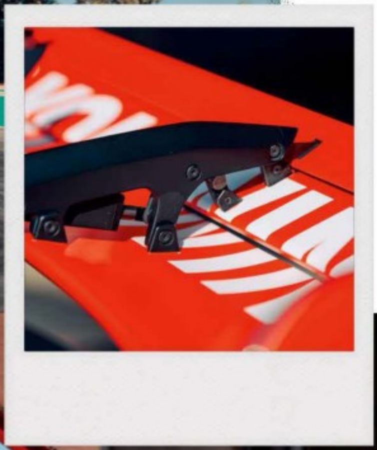
But if the Touring is sophisticated wine tasting, the Manthey is syringes of Red Bull straight into your eyeballs. It takes the already outrageous 992 GT3 RS and turns every dial further than you thought possible. The Manthey is the only car where you can lean on its race pads and brake at the very bottom of Portimão's scary dip at the end of the main straight into Turn 1. Arriving everywhere with more apex speed than anything else, the front bites with such aggression you feel the feedback travel from the wheels, through the wishbones, up your arms and into your brain in real time. The changes of direction through Turns 3 and 4 are surgical, the car carving new lines with absurd agility. With over 1,000kg of downforce at 177mph (that's a GMA T.50 parked on the roof) there's aero grip everywhere. But whenever you can, you press the DRS button, the carbon wing flattens, drag falls away, and suddenly you've got another gear of speed before the next corner. It's not a gimmick. You feel it.

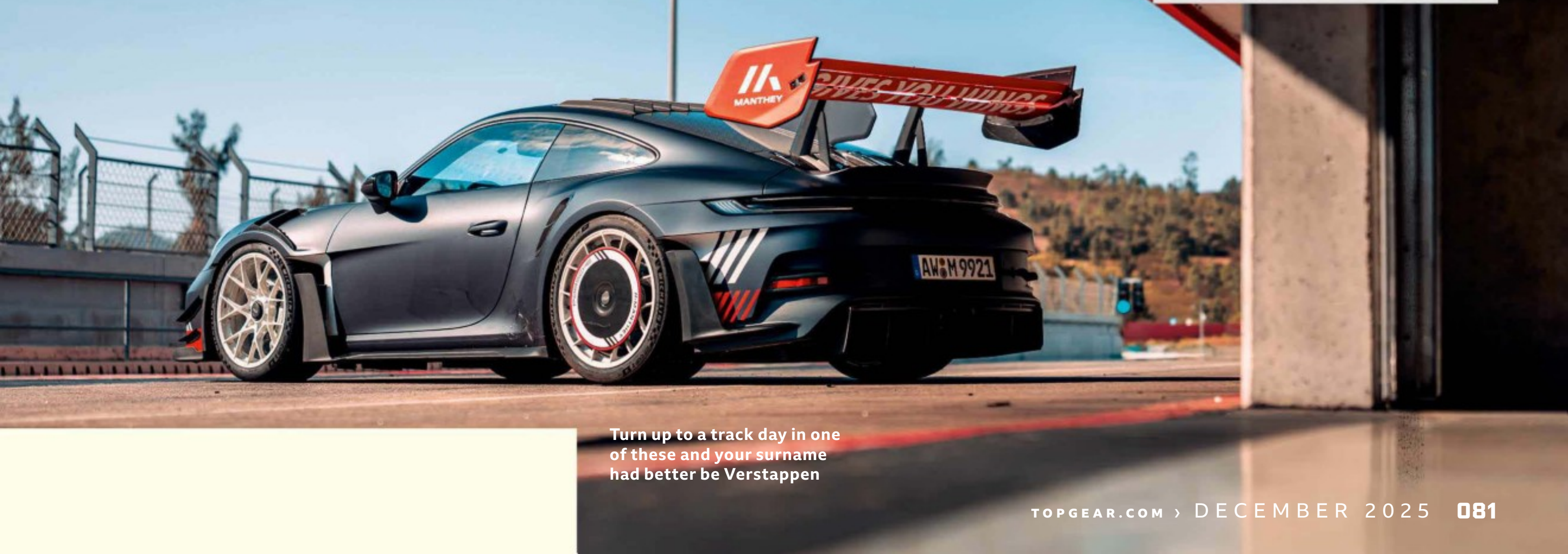
The voodoo of this road car that drives like a Cup racer is that it can simultaneously flatter amateurs as well as indulge pros. In the hands of racing drivers, the Manthey kit is 10 seconds quicker around the Nürburgring. In the hands of fat, fleshy mortals, it can be as many as 30 seconds faster than your best. But as Spider-Man's Uncle Ben never said, with big aero comes big responsibility. Especially when you have 'Gives You Wings' tattooed underneath your park bench sized spoiler. Turn up to a track day in a 3RS MR and every MX-5 and M3 will come after you. Because if you've spent £100k on a go faster kit for your £200k car and you're not handy, expect to be roasted across WhatsApp groups and Instagram.

There was a time when a GT3 was just… a GT3. Raw, noisy, brilliant – a one size fits all road racer. A little rawer than a Carrera, a little tamer than a Cup car, good enough for the B-road and the track day, without needing a degree in aerodynamics to understand. But that was then. A Porsche GT3 in 2025 is not a jack of all trades, but a master of extremes. The Touring shows how far you can down the road of usability and purity. The Manthey RS shows how far you can go in the other direction – track performance that barely seems road legal and somehow has a factory warranty. GT3 is now an ecosystem of excellence and the Manthey is taking things in a whole new, more radical direction. And that should be celebrated. Plus, it's got a road setting. And numberplates. Are you thinking what I'm thinking?

Manual GT3 Touring – you're getting 95 per cent of the more expensive and exotic S/T

There's getting it sideways nice and early… and then there's this





Turn up to a track day in one of these and your surname had better be Verstappen

Red Bull
Ford
FORD
RAPTOR
SAFARI RALLY

PCOTY
2025

DAKARRRRR

GGGHHHHHHH

The Defender Octa is about as serious as road legal off roaders get… can it stick with a full blown Dakar truck?

WORDS OLLIE MARRIAGE **PHOTOGRAPHY** MARK RICCIONI

THE OCTA IS IN ITS NATURAL ENVIRONMENT. OR AT LEAST THE ONE IT was designed for. Because this ain't Chelsea, it's Portimão's rally track. And this Defender is taking to it in a way no other modern SUV would dare to. It's funny, isn't it? Until now, no one has made an SUV specifically designed for fast off road use. Except the Americans. They get this stuff, they get that it's fun to slap Fox shocks under an F150 and go play, but in Europe we get SUVs that attempt to mimic super saloons, or serious off roaders that are re-urbanised with V8s and 23s.

For us the Defender Octa is something new, something different. Something a bit silly. A Defender, reoriented. It's taken a step beyond the ubiquitous G63, because it's been given not just a twin turbo V8, but a mission, a purpose.

Go play. That about sums it up. This is not a prissy or precious car, but comes across as the kind of car that would wear battle scars proudly, were any owner bold enough to use their £145,300 investment that way. Today we are, and the Defender is storming

‘THIS IS OFF ROADING AS I LOVE IT. THE FAST CHARGE, NOT THE SLOW CRAWL’ along the routes and tracks that run up into the hillsides overlooking the circuit.

This is off roading as I love it – the fast charge, not the slow crawl – and the Octa is behaving like a 2.5-tonne rally car. It'll Scandi flick into corners, then send rocks and stones scattering at the scenery and its own reinforced undersides as the 626bhp V8 gets to work. At times it pulls over 1*g* of lateral load through the more banked corners. That's proper big boy grip.

The suspension is the thing. This uses the same 6D hydraulically cross linked system that underpins the Range Rover Sport SV that failed to wow us at PCOTY last year. On track that had hopped and skipped around – too much tyre grip for the system to deal with. Here, wearing burly 20-inch Goodyear Wranglers, it's a different story. It's supple and composed, deals with the weight beautifully and best of all there's no judder and shudder as it thunders along, because the suspension is so well insulated.

Look, there's not much feel through the steering or controls, but driving it quickly breeds confidence because it comes across as a tough truck, bang up for the best kind of messing around. And next year Defender is intending to prove just how tough and robust this thing actually is by taking something closely related to the Dakar rally.

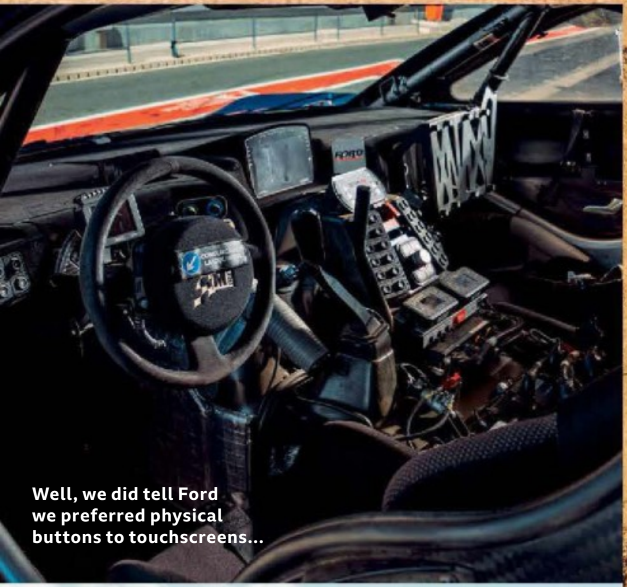
Where it'll be roundly pounded by the complete nutjob that is the Ford Raptor T1+. But of course it will – the Raptor is a top line silhouette racer that is meant to somehow remind you of a pickup. The Defender D7XR will compete in the T2/Stock class. About time too. We've been banging on about the Defender needing to prove its reliability with some sort of extreme challenge, next January in Saudi it will get the chance.

The Raptor has come with a Nani. Nani is a loon. What's immediately apparent as we launch into the scenery (and, too late, I realise I've forgotten to connect the HANS device to my helmet) is that Nani doesn't see tracks as you and I do. We see corridors, track limits created by bushes, trees, gullies and banks.

Now go and watch the video on *topgear.com*

Normally this approach angle equals air bags detonated and a mullered front bumper… not here

Octa button at the bottom of the wheel gives easy access to max attack mode



Well, we did tell Ford we preferred physical buttons to touchscreens...

Nani knows best

Nani Roma is a Dakar veteran. He's been competing in the world's toughest, most gruelling endurance race for 30 years, and has won it on both two wheels and four. Above all, Dakar needs experience – not just in the driving, but in the car development too.

Before signing for Ford last year, Nani drove for Prodrive in the BRX Hunter. Yeah, the two do have a strong suggestion of similarity (the Hunter has now morphed into the Dacia Sandrider), both front mid-engined with a giant 500-litre fuel tank behind the seats and a pair of spare wheels nestled on the flanks. Imitation is clearly the sincerest form of flattery where the Dakar is concerned.

"But compared to the Hunter, this is much more advanced," comments Nani. "We have really worked on siting the occupants as centrally as possible, so they're not exposed to the pitch, dive and roll. This means it's less tiring to drive so we can go harder, for longer."

“IT FEELS FASTER, MORE AGILE, CARRIES ITS MASS MORE LIGHTLY”

But Dakar doesn’t work like that, so nor does Nani. It’s navigational, you go where you please to get where you need to be as quickly and directly as possible. Which is how he now treats our rally stage. There’s a right hander coming up, but he’s turned left and now we’re careering across an off-camber slope because he’s spotted a shortcut that avoids the narrow slalom between a pair of trees. Vegetation scuffs under the Raptor’s armoured underside, doing no more than tickling its belly.

This is wide angle driving, the opposite of tunnel vision and Nani’s route radar is pinging in a way I can’t comprehend. Now he’s pointing head on at a near vertical bank that’s taller than the Raptor itself. Brace, brace, brace. We punch into it, the suspension appears not to notice, but our trajectory has fundamentally changed. All I can see is sky. Everything goes quiet. And a moment later all I can see is ground. You know those Arctic foxes Attenborough narrated diving headfirst into the snow? Well, the Raptor does a commendable impression. I clench everything. And once again the suspension and 37in tyres soak up the impact of a six foot nosedive as easily as a Rolls does a speed bump.

Once I’ve refound my land legs I have a peer underneath. The twin damper arrangement at each corner has so many pipes, tubes and valves running around it you’d think you were looking at a steam engine. It’s ludicrous. But what it’s capable of is remarkable. I’ve been lucky enough to drive quite a few Dakar cars over the past decade, including the BRX Hunter and Audi’s high tech RS Q e-tron hybrid, but this does fundamentally shift things.

It feels faster, more agile, carries its mass more lightly. Comes across as more like a WRC car. Maybe not such a surprise when you learn it’s been engineered and developed by M-Sport, Ford’s long time rally partner. It’s the best thing ever to drive off road. Not least because of the outrageous noise it makes as charges around. Those working in the pitlane claim they can’t hear the Revuelto belting past on the main straight due to the noise this thing’s making hundreds of metres away. A proper uncorked 5.0-litre

Hang on, kids! The school run just got a whole lot spicier

KP25 EUY
FORD

Raptor is the less practical family car, sure, but for crossing deserts at obscene speeds it's the obvious choice

Coyote V8 race engine put in a spaceframe chassis that you can point at anything and win.

The Octa was good out here, but the Raptor was born here. It's all it's ever known or will ever know. The cabin is tight, the controls purposefully light to reduce fatigue, but to drive it gives me a sense of utter bulletproof invincibility, a car born to take punishment. As Nani said before I drove it, it needs to be driven hard, you need the weight moving around, because when you do that you barely need the steering to change direction, everything can be done with small movements, just setting up an angle of attack before nailing the throttle and letting the three locking diffs and permanent 4WD sort everything else out. You don't want too much angle Nani tells me, as it's when the tyre slides sideways it's most likely to puncture.

I drove Hyundai's i20 WRC car here at Speed Week six years ago and there are marked similarities in the manners and behaviour of both. Only the scale has changed. Both experiences go into my drawer of special memories.

And just as we did with that, we took this on to the tarmac as well. Wouldn't you? Just to see it out there alongside the belly scrapers and chin scratchers. It was suitably idiotic, the hydraulic handbrake meant it cut some amazing shapes, but we realised that it mainly turns 520 litres of fuel into noise rather than forward progress – a constricted 355bhp (and Dakar limited 112mph max) is fine in the rough, dull when the Octa has nigh on double the power. Not that the burly Brit feels 4.0secs to 62mph fast.

Or particularly happy on a hard track. We have found the Octa's unhappy place, because it doesn't really know what to do. You can turn in on the brakes and it will four wheel drift past the apex, but otherwise it understeers scrappily around. Obviously fitting road focused tyres will improve things dramatically, but let's face it, the Octa isn't designed to be a hard surface car. We know already that it is a great (if extremely thirsty) daily driver, and there's more than enough bandwidth between quiet cruiser and cross country charger to keep us happy – far rather this breadth of capability than an Urus or Cayenne Turbo.

Ideally, we'd like it to have a bit more edge – particularly the engine which, even when not being completely drowned out by the Raptor, is too muffled and quiet. First job for most owners, I expect. I don't know where you'd use the Octa in the UK – we just don't have the wide open playgrounds that America specialises in – and I have a distressing sense the Octa will be used in exactly the same way as any other Defender, only more obnoxiously. It's a shame, as there's nothing else really like it. Land Rover has found a niche and plugged it very well. If Land Rover can coax a car or two to the end of the Dakar next year that will be a victory in itself. The Raptor? That'll be up the sharp end of the running, making enough noise to set the Saudi sand trembling.

PCOTY 2025

MAKING IT HAPPEN

EÇÃO KARTS
STOP
SOLVERDE
INOS & HOTÉIS
CASINOS DO ALGARVE
YEAR
ROAD
RACE
THIS IS PAST
DOUBLE VISION
BTS
40
TopGear
V12 AML
ORYTON

26
TopGear
autódrom
internac
algarve
CORYTON
PORSCHE

PCOTY, OFTEN REFERRED TO AS 'THE BEST WEEK OF THE YEAR', IS MERELY the cherry on top of a dense gateau of organisation. I shan't bore you with the details, but Ben Pulman was last seen disappearing under an avalanche of insurance waivers. We're hoping to dig him out before Christmas.

Huge thanks to the staff at the Portimão circuit for having us, the loan of the pallet truck for transporting The Stig, and letting us establish on your kart track that Charlie Rose weighs less than a bag of sugar. The big track is simply the ultimate arena for a test like this – wide, fast, bathed in perfect weather and home to a couple of terrifying blind corners you could spend a lifetime trying to perfect. Hats off to the F1 boys for sending it around here.

A big *obrigado* to Coryton for supplying several barrels of its delicious Sustain 80 sustainable fuel and to the manufacturers for backing us and shipping cars and support crews from far and wide. A special shout out to Nani Roma for flying in to check his company car was in safe(ish) hands.

And here's to the best team of writers, designers, photographers and videographers in the world, who worked (quite literally) flat out to produce terabytes of footage, tens of thousands of images and a few choice words… despite a spicy bout of norovirus ripping through the ranks. Reader, we held the line and all mucked in, in the hope of transporting you to the track with us and letting you experience, in some way, this unbelievable gathering of cars.

WORDS JACK RIX
PHOTOGRAPHY JOHN WYCHERLEY & MARK RICCIONI

PCOTY 2025

FINAL DES

YH75 AHC
V12 AML

STINATION

NTHEY
AW M 9921
GX 144YS

From 12 contenders to our top five. One road drive is all that stands between them and immortality

WORDS OLLIE KEW
PHOTOGRAPHY MARK RICCIONI

THE RACETRACK HAS BARELY RECEDED INTO OUR REARVIEW MIRRORS BEFORE THE INEVITABLE MODERN DAY PETROLHEAD S.O.S CHIRPS FROM THE WALKIE TALKIE. "ARGH! DOES ANYONE KNOW BMW'S CHEAT CODE TO SWITCH OFF THE LANE ASSIST SPEED ST?" JETHRO GROANS FROM THE M2. JACK GLOATS IN THE EVO37'S SIMPLICITY. "FUNNY. I DON'T HAVE THAT PROBLEM IN THE KIMERA."**

Largely because at about half the width of the Revuelto ahead, it'd be pretty damn unlikely to wander out of its lane. After minutes strapped aboard the Manthey 911, Rowan is fantasising about eloping to a tarmac road rally, blissfully unaware as its razor blade diffuser flirts with slicing the undulating, technical B roads of the Algarve.

I'm quietly taking this in from the cossetting opulence of the Aston Martin Vanquish. With about half the *TopGear* team (plus several factory spannermen) struck down with a mystery virus, I'm feeling peaky and the decision to begin our road finalist showdown in a comforting gentleman's express in an air conditioned seat is entirely out of self interest. Sorry boys.

Even without the impromptu crash diet, I'd gladly skip breakfast to hit the road in our fab five. Sometimes road bound finalists decide themselves unanimously, but 2025's crop was a points decision.

The Lambo bred intrigue. Stupefyingly fast and glorious to listen to from two villages away. A proper shock 'n' awe 21st century supercar. But would the two tonne 1,001bhp rocket ship prove frustratingly constrained on the public road?

The GT3 RS too – easily the best road legal car I've ever lapped a racetrack in – but it can't be usable on the public highway. Can it? Surely twisting the lap time focus knob until it breaks off in Manthey Racing's hand is too much even for the endlessly adaptable Porsche 911? We had to know. Once we'd set some juicy bait to tempt out The Stig.

From the instant it rolled off the transporter and flashed us the prettiest four cylinder engine bay ever created, we yearned for the Kimera to be as supreme to drive as it is to look at. On track it was hard work, but worth putting in a shift. So we gambled it wouldn't succumb to the usual restomod reliability woes.

The Aston pipped the Ferrari, just as it did on our road showdown last winter. Both are hilariously powerful indulgent V12s and the Ferrari's heart has a more soulful crescendo, but you're too arse puckeringly s**t scared to savour the moment. Ferrari's had to muffle its touchstone powerplant to limbo under noise and emission barriers (which isn't its fault) so it presents itself as a relaxed GT to distance itself from the mid-engined horses in the stable.

But one by one, ashen faced drivers staggered from it in Portimão's pitlane, miming sudden gobs of oversteer with sodden, white knuckled hands, stammering expletives with bone dry mouths. Might be the lurgy. Or it might be that the wallowy yet spikey 12Cilindri is caught between two stools. The more trustworthy, better role defined Vanquish wins the battle, and brings a British pluck to an Italian and German dominated final.

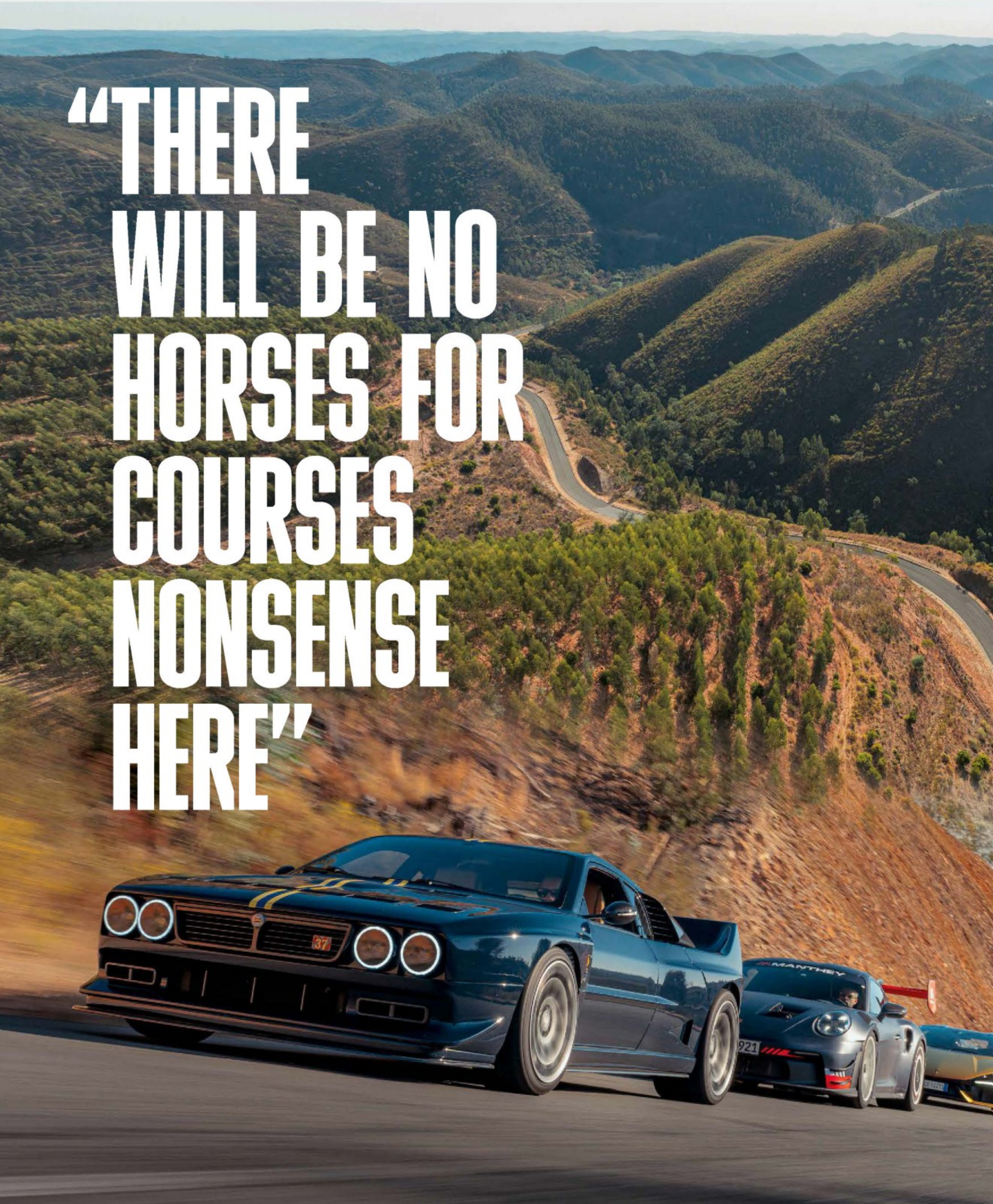
It nearly had Korean interest, but by just one vote the BMW M2 CS nicked it from under the playful Hyundai Ioniq 6 N's manatee nose. Like the Porsche, there's a curiosity about how it will translate onto the road on less extreme rubber, after BMW insisted it could only be driven on track wearing optional Cup 2 R tyres treated to a tedious

"One thousand kg of downforce, you say? Challenge accepted..."

Now go and watch the video on *topgear.com*

Sorry, if 'number of exhaust pipes' is your Top Trumps pick then M2 beats the Lambo every time

“THERE WILL BE NO HORSES FOR COURSES NONSENSE HERE”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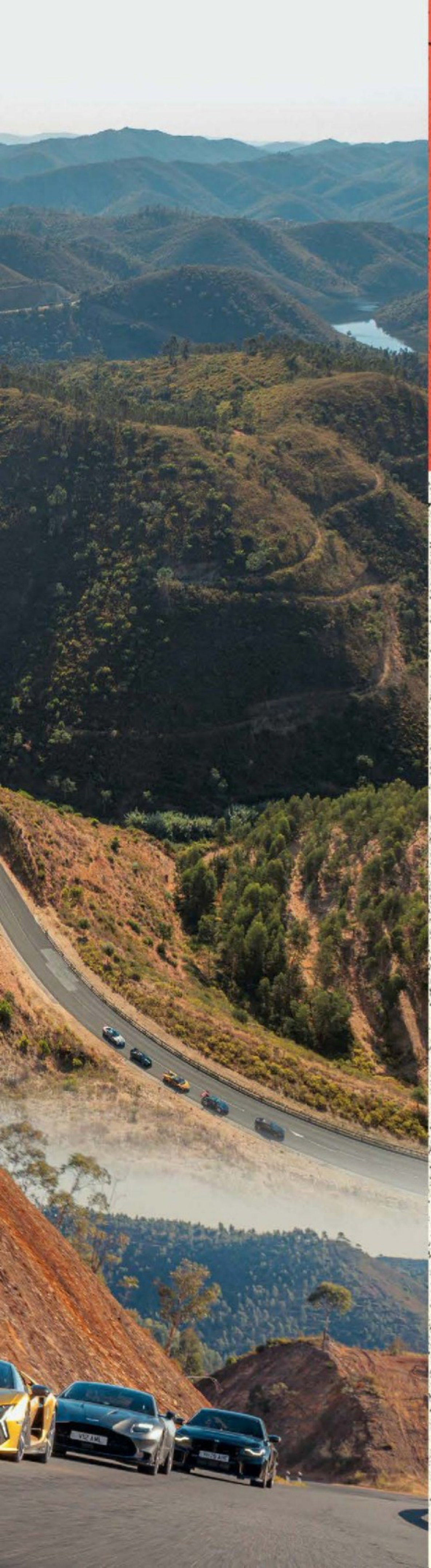

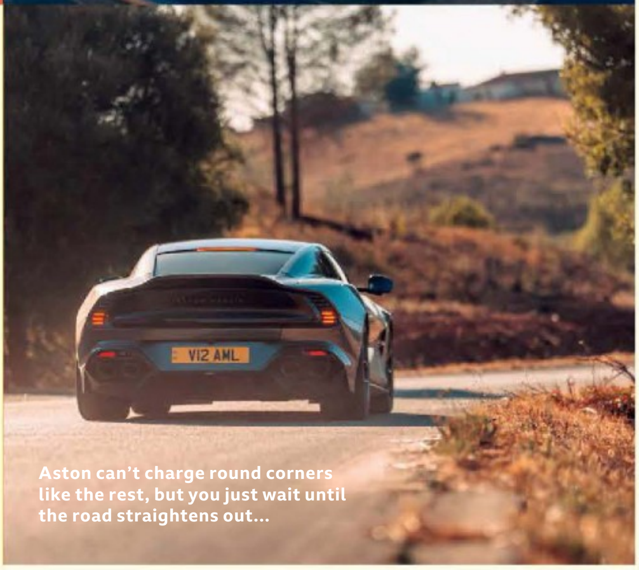

Aston can't charge round corners like the rest, but you just wait until the road straightens out...

warm up cycle. Y'know, just like you do at home before enjoying a B road blast.

A worthy, world class quintet then. The restomod. The track refugee. The hybrid hypercar. The sports coupe. And surveying them from the rear gunner position, the big, raffish grand touring cruise missile. There will be no horses for courses nonsense here. No sports day participation rosettes, I promise you. Let's go crown a champion.

The sun's barely crept above the treetops, but editor Jack is already moist in the Kimera, which only has aircon until the water temp gauge reads 90°C. Then it's like being strapped down in front of four salon hairdryers on max reheat. Normally photographers insist we drive windows up, but Rix is being boiled.

"I've got to have the windows down, but that just adds to it. I feel like I should have a cigarette on just for the look," he pants. Too right. With Martini overalls, floppy 1980s Group B hair and sunglasses even bigger than Jethro's 'Ibiza Final Boss' effort.

Billowing overrun flames from its tarnished tailpipes, the Kimera looks perfectly at home as we climb into the hills, as if we've been teleported onto a forgotten stage of the Acropolis rally. Chasing it down, the M2 is all taut and upright, the Lambo like a camp stealth bomber and the Manthey hilariously incongruous. "How is that f*****g thing road legal?" Jethro guffaws for the thousandth time, as Rowan deploys the DRS.

The Vanquish is left behind in the narrow, blind bends but has the entire convoy on a piece of elastic. As the road unfurls, the V12

V12 AML
GIVES YOU WINGS
AW M 9921
Alferce
Monchique
Portimão
STOP

"Sorry officer, I couldn't see you chasing me because I have swapped my window for a fin"

The BMW manages to have a trickle more horsepower AND stay on the road without wings. Magic!

bellows into the boost zone and it reels in everything in its path. Supercars. Vegetation. Small animals. It's a proper battle cruiser. Scratch that, it manages the curious trick of feeling overengined despite being the size of an aircraft carrier and rides more maturely than last year's tearaway Vantage.

By the time we regroup in the northeastern reaches of the Serra de Monchique, doing warp nine in the lavish Vanquish cabin has left my morning queasiness at sea level. It's that life affirming.

Rowan yearns for the Aston's blown V12 to sound as exotic as it looks, but Jethro declares it the most bad arse car in the world and his eyes brim with patriotic pride at its ability to paint black lines up the road without breaking traction, so rich is the torque. I wish it had more snap to its gearchanges, but it's so relentlessly fast through third and fourth that quibbling over shift speeds is like grumbling at Liam Gallagher for drawling out of key.

It's a beauty, a cad, and amid the lunatic Vantage, vastly improved interiors and becoming a mid-engined supercar force, Aston Martin has never done it better.

Car swap time. I employ Jack's patented PCOTY tactic – grab the fastest, scariest thing you can see. Don't build up to it. That'll be the Lambo then, which Tom Ford has been impressed with on the way up. "I'm enjoying it, despite my better judgement," he says. "It doesn't feel as wide, or as stupid as it looks."

It's swear out loud fast though. Of all the recent super hybrids, this Lambo is easily the most cohesive. You aren't aware there's an electrically assisted V12 meshing with an eight speed twin clutch gearbox, plus an electric motor for each front wheel. There's no sense of a committee meeting going on downstairs, negotiating how many horses charge where.

It's just pedal, noise, force. Lamborghini has understood the job of its flagship V12 is to turn petrol and carbon fibre into drama. It's still a massive intimidating wedge, but I feel well positioned in the nose to manage the hellfire being unleashed. It controls its considerable mass impressively, and the engine and gearbox is just about peerless, but you've got to put up with a ride that's as yielding as its sadistic seats, and no one gels with the stiff, numb brake pedal.

Parked, the Revuelto magnetises swooning bystanders and camera phones until the Kimera arrives, at which point even a pinky gold V12 Lambo driven by *TV's Tom 'Wookie' Ford* turns invisible. Jethro sounds mind made up after another sweaty sprint down the N-267 in the EVO37. "It's authentic, it's a feast, it's a restomod for people who really want to drive. I cannot think of an engine which exudes more energy than this – it's like being *inside* the engine bay."

I reason the biggest contrast after the Lambo on full afterburner is to try the most normal car, so I naff off in the M2 CS. Which absolutely aces it. It has the poise and aggression missing from the lardy (but nice to live with) standard M2. Pugnacious, exploitable without playing life insurance Russian roulette and finally freed of temperature sensitive track rubber, it's just a superb road car.

I arrive back at base camp wondering if that's not the most fun I've had all week. If nothing else, it's a useful palate cleanser. No hybrid this or aero that. Just a mother lode of straight six poke and a playful tail end. The M car signature dish.

At our lunch stop, a summit converges to thrash out some sort of order. Wookie wields the axe first. "For me the Aston can't win. It's the one that gives up first when you're driving quick – it has all that vertical movement which tells you it's not really a supercar, it's a very, very, *very* fast GT car."

The BMW is in mine and Jethro's top three but hasn't won over Jack, Rowan or Wook, and we're united in horror at the price. We love an underdog on these tests, but £90k for a 2-Series is obscene. Yes, inflation is high. Cars are expensive. But the entry level M car has to offer something we can aspire to affording, I sagely reason while opening the door to a car draped in a £100,000 body kit.

Alright, that's harsh on the Manthey Racing 911. This is pukka motorsport blooded aero from a pedigree outfit, plus gorgeous overhauled suspension and indestructible brakes. And the absolute brass neck of looking at a GT3 RS and thinking "We can top that".

It's a warrantied, official piece of Porsche accessorydom too. Jethro has recently returned from the Nürburgring and reports a GT3 RS MR is very much the *du jour* uniform. Meanwhile on the road… you've got to be in the mood.

The Manthey drops a tactical nuke on the maxim that sliding a car is fun, that misbehaviour is personality. It makes *grip* fun. Vast, cosmic quantities of grip. So much road wrinkling grip it starts giving you physiotherapy. In the middle of one corner I swear it made my neck click. To give you an idea of just how mental the grip is, you almost forget the car is being pushed along by possibly the best engine ever shoved up a 911's bottom. That searing 9,000rpm flat six is overshadowed by sheer physics.

But no one – not even certifiable car sadist Rowan – can pretend it's uncompromised on the road, or as dailyable as a GT3. It's not just the filled in window. Whatever you do with the dampers – Normal, Sport or Track, rebound or compression twizzled either way, it's spectacularly controlled but rock solid. And spends most of the day catching air until it rips its own diffuser off. It's an astonishingly selfish experience. Only bring a passenger if they're as fully committed as you to raw, undiluted speed.

"I EMPLOY JACK'S PATENTED PCOTY TACTIC: GRAB THE SCARIEST THING YOU SEE"

As I winch myself out of the Manthey's grown up, ice cool cabin I realise I've catastrophically misjudged when to drive the Kimera. It's the hottest point of the day and its unadorned steering wheel is already damp with the others' sweat. To the generous owner who lent his personal EVO37 for this test, *obrigado*. Send us the steam cleaning bill. Or if you don't want it any more, your car. For keeps.

Wow. Jethro wasn't wrong when he mooted the Kimera is *even* better out here than it was on the circuit. This right sized, achingly cool machine is utterly absorbing to drive.

There is almost no part of your body not being kept busy. All of your left leg, from hip to calf to ankle and toe, forces down the sturdy clutch. Right foot tippy tapping across the offset pedals to manage rev matching and keep the twin engine boosting. Left hand clasping the

The Algarve hills are alive… with the sound of internal combustion. One day this lineup might be completely electric. Today is not that day

Never take sweeties from strangers… but baked goods from a man in a van are fine

wriggling wheel. Right hand slotting delectable gearchanges. Eyebrows catching bullets of sweat, ears deciphering the snorting, chirruping, whining cacophony. Mouth whooping with laughter you can barely hear.

Up until now, I've merely been commanding the other cars, guiding them, mostly restraining them. But this – this is *driving*. The only thing wrong besides cabin temperature is the name. It needs something more Italian and flamboyant than Kimera, the seventh Kardashian.

After our lunchtime negotiations and a dollop more driving, a podium has emerged. Fine cars both, but the Aston and BMW are cut adrift. Each are best in class, but neither can unite enough support to spray the champagne. It's going to come down to the Manthey, the Kimera, or the Lamborghini. All three are intoxicating experiences that frankly feel like they ought to be illegal in 2025. How do we separate them?

There's handwringing over the Lambo technically not emerging in the 12 months since our previous PCOTY – but truth is we've begged Lambo for one to take part since we first drove it in Oct 2023, but this is the first year the factory has been able to supply one. No one drawn into its tractor beam quibbled about its age. They went slack jawed and weak kneed, then frowned in confusion as it slipped away in e-mode before the V12 barked into life. What an engine!

Usually, a Lamborghini trades on lunacy and a Porsche is the all rounder. This year upended that. The forgiving yet frightening Revuelto is a more complete car than the singular Manthey RS. Lamborghini just 'gets' how to distil what makes a great supercar better than anyone right now. Excess all areas, but your grannie could max it. The fact it's the 'base model' is very tantalising indeed.

But from the moment it chuntered into our lives and hypnotised everyone in earshot – even Ferrari's mechanics – one car has stolen the show this year. And we hope you understand this controversial call.

Because the Kimera EVO37 is not a new car. It's descended, very distantly, from the late 1970s. Therefore it is small and light. It has thin pillars and no airbag. It does not have to comply with any of the brutal crash tests or emissions exams which dictate how the other four are built and operate. Though it's essentially brand new from camera equipped ducktail to slightly tarty LED headlamp, the law considers it a venerable antique. And into that loophole, Kimera's scored a hole in one.

And we aren't aghast to find it doesn't connect to our phone, or helpfully chirp when parking, or even keep us cool. This gives it an enormous unfair advantage over the children of the system in 2025. Which let's face it, is making driving more stupefyingly irritable by the month.

We thought the Kimera might break down. It was bulletproof. We worried it might be form over function, retro style over substance. But it's mesmerising to drive – physical, refreshing, nostalgic, and the reset we all crave. The Revuelto is the very best of what a cutting edge fast car can be... and yet, the industry has more to learn from the EVO37 than anything else present.

Cars simply cannot go on getting bigger, heavier, more powerful and more technologically advanced yet remain tactile and rewarding to drive. Thrilling yes, but this satisfying? Not for us.

And though – like all restomods – it's flipping expensive, this reborn Lancia is no pricier than this particular Lambo. We literally sweated it. We grimaced and argued and agonised. And then we decided, unanimously, that the sensational Kimera EVO37 is *TopGear*'s 2025 Performance Car of the Year.

"I'VE BEEN MERELY COMMANDING THE OTHER CARS. BUT THIS – *THIS* IS DRIIVNG"

PCOTY
2025
WINNER

KIMERA EVO37

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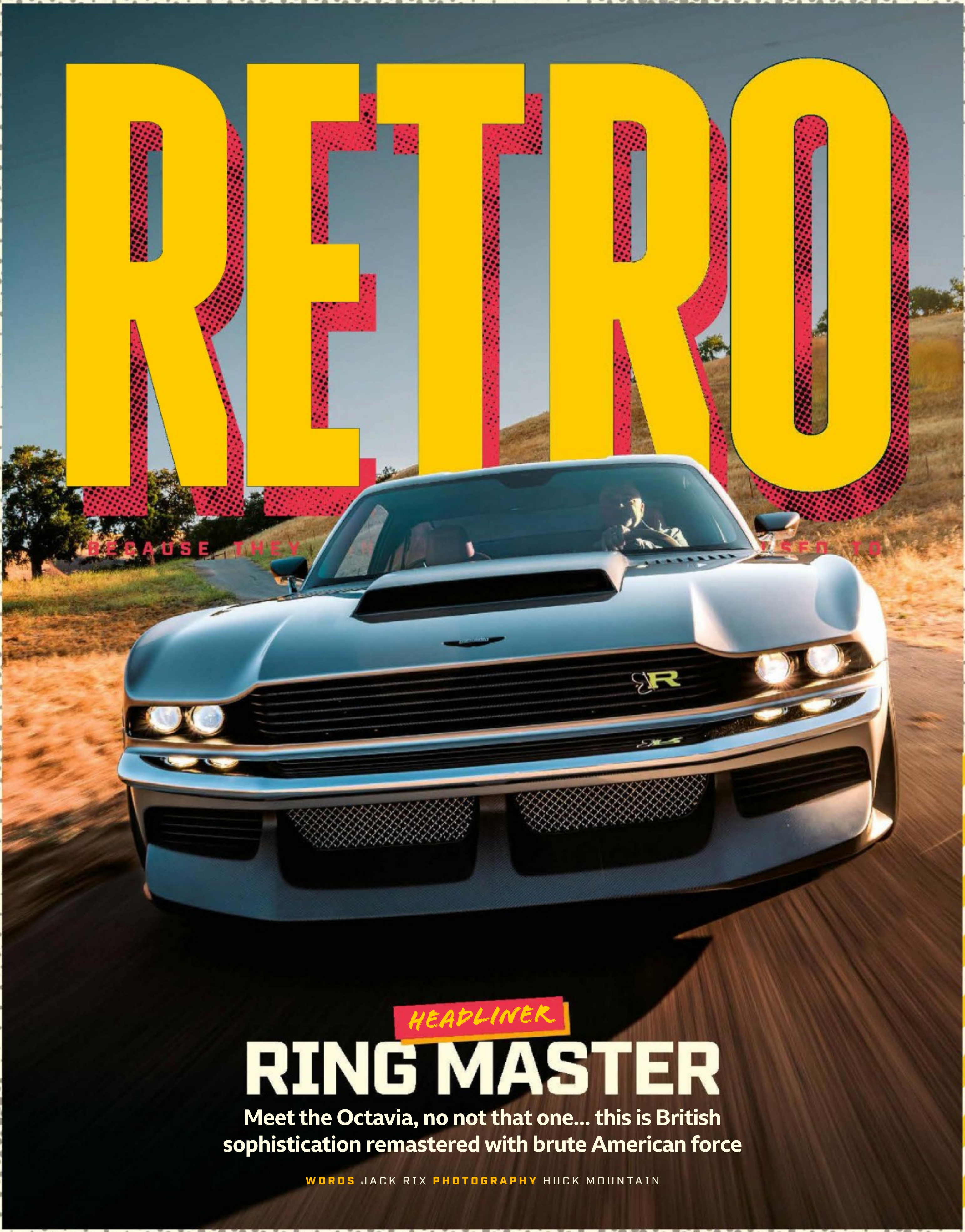
RETRO

BECAUSE THEY USED TO



HEADLINER

RING MASTER

Meet the Octavia, no not that one… this is British sophistication remastered with brute American force

WORDS JACK RIX **PHOTOGRAPHY** HUCK MOUNTAIN

R

Regular readers will be familiar with the Ring brothers, the ‘just the right amount of mad’ Wisconsin based tuners who started out as (and still run) an auto body shop… and then turned their attention to churning out the most unreal bespoke restomod builds. We’ve been to visit them in their hometown of Spring Green before, but this time we intercepted one half of the duo, Mike Ring, at the Quail – a staple of Monterey Car Week – where they were unwittingly making Skoda’s lawyers a bit twitchy.

“We’ve combined the ferocity of American muscle with the stiff upper lip of English sophistication and motoring,” said Mike. “Octavia is beyond anything we’ve built before.” Welcome to the wildest incarnation of Aston Martin’s 1970s superhero. And not a medium sized Skoda. It is an old 1971 DBS classic stripped, stretched, beefed up and filled with five litres of pure American firepower.

How did it come about? Mike is typically and unashamedly honest. “The owner is a super cool, local guy. He said, ‘What do you guys want to build?’ We’ve always wanted to do a European car because Jim and I don’t know s**t about cars. I mean, we know American muscle, we grew up with it, but I can’t tell you about old cars and I can’t tell you about European cars. We literally Googled ‘European muscle car’ and a DBS was at the top and we’re like, yeah dude, we want to do James Bond.”

This is an approach to project selection that we can very much relate to… same goes for Mike and Jim’s critical eye for car design. “A week later the owner bought one off Bring a Trailer [Auctions]. It didn’t run, it was just sitting there waiting to die. We’d never seen one in our life and man they’re so flat sided, almost like they used it in a Bond movie and drove between houses and just kept

“WELCOME TO THE WILDEST INCARNATION OF ASTON MARTIN’S 1970s SUPERHERO”

Brings a whole new meaning to making a booty call

“THIS WASN’T SOME RIVET THE ARCHES AND SLAP ON THE FILLER JOB”

Your dad's Octavia *definitely* doesn't look like this...

that son of a b***h flat all the way through. Straight away we knew we had to put some booty on the back."

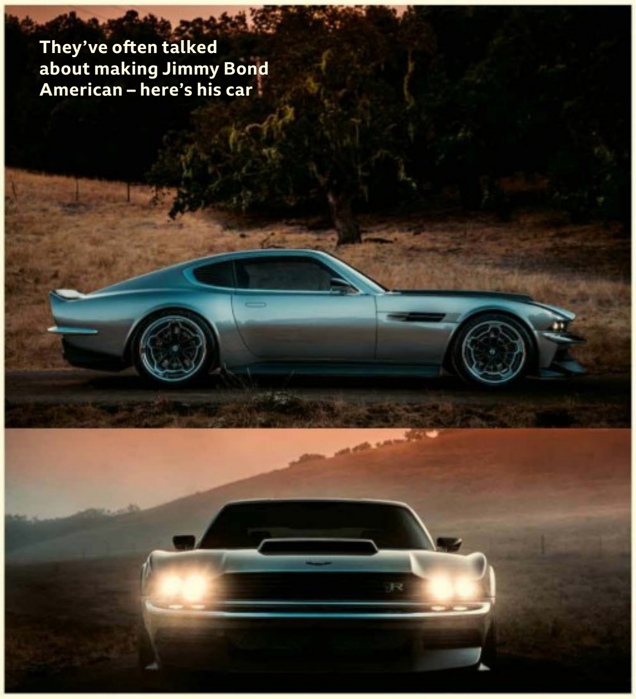
And so they widened it by 10 inches, making it 82 inches (2,082mm) across at the rear and 78 (1,981mm) up front, which is there or thereabouts a Lamborghini Revuelto's worth of girth. "But it still looks balanced," Mike adds, and he's not wrong. Probably because this wasn't some rivet the arches and slap on the filler job, it's all designed in CAD and made entirely in carbon fibre.

"From CAD to this was like, two and a half years. But from when we started getting the parts it took about a year." As for the donor car? "We took all the parts off – doors, fenders – bonded it up and made a bar." Mike nods towards the back of the stand where a barman stands behind a dissected DBS. "It's a James Bond thing... we got to serve martinis."

And what of the engine? A refettled version of the original 280bhp, 4.0-litre straight six? Not exactly... "We reached out to Aston early on and they said they just didn't have the bandwidth to help right now. So since Ford had a relationship with Aston, we thought we'd run a Coyote in it. Supercharged. They run good, they sound good and we know them, right? The last thing we want to do is build something that we can't make run. I mean, we are not engineers."

It runs Ford's 5.0-litre V8, matched to a 2.65-litre supercharger to provide 805 American horses. It's hooked up to a six speed manual gearbox driving the rear wheels, and the entire drivetrain is packaged inside a custom chassis with the wheelbase stretched by 76mm over the original DBS. A structural roll cage is integrated into the body, there's independent rear suspension, C7 Vette sway bars, Fox Racing dampers and Brembo brakes, so not as unsophisticated as Mike might have you believe. It was designed by a chap called Gary Ragle, with "echoes" of William Townsend's original buried in there somewhere. Ringbrothers said the aim was for "Coke bottle curvature". Naturally the interior got just as much attention, being lavished with carbon fibre, stainless steel, leather and even a few cheeky nods to That Famous Spy who likes Astons – including a dipstick handle shaped like a martini glass.

In terms of price for this one off, Mike wouldn't be drawn, but you get the feeling that's because he doesn't actually know. Or care. "We're trying to sell another one so that we can spread the cost a bit for the owner... it was quite expensive. Even the exhaust tips we machined, that was $1,000 just for the chunk of stainless. My first quote for four pieces of glass was $92,000. Yeah, building bespoke has a cost, but honestly if I had to build the same car over and over, I wouldn't be doing it because I would just lose interest. If it was all about money, I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing."



They've often talked about making Jimmy Bond American – here's his car

It might not be a business model from any Harvard textbook, but that's what makes the brothers so magnetic. Everything they touch is an extension of their passion and artistry, not a ploy to maximise profits. I ask Mike if he sees himself as an artist. "I don't see myself as anything. I just see myself as lucky to be able to do this. And honestly, people go, when are you going to retire? I don't want to retire. This is what I'd do if I was retired. I'm lucky to work with my wife, and my son's now involved in the machining side. I just want to continue building cool stuff until I'm in the ground. Look, we're not curing cancer, we're just having fun."

JAPAN'S NEW DAWN

FARE GAME

What's it like to be a cabbie in a city where the streets have no name? We meet a master of the night

WORDS: DAN READ | PHOTOGRAPHY: IRWIN WONG

The big picture

TAKING A TAXI WITH THE ULTIMATE CABBIE

"Sudow-san has been ferrying commuters around for 18 years. He was once a bricklayer, but quit when the economy boomed and there was more cash to be made in cabbing. He passed his map exam first time and has since taken around a hundred thousand fares. But his window on the world hasn't turned him into some prowling, mohawked De Niro. Instead, he's risen through the taxi ranks to become a Mr Miyagi, a grand master recognised by an official 'A' rating and tutor to young students of the trade. He teaches road manners inspired by Buddhism, and appears to have invented some sort of Zen roadcraft.

"He sits comfortably with his legs apart, resting one hand on his knee, the other on the wheel. A booster seat helps him see over the dashboard. The essence of good taxi driving, he says, is to be patient, friendly and industrious."

PHOTOGRAPHY: IRWIN WONG **WORDS:** DAN READ

REMEMBERING
RETRO GAMING
THE CLASSICS

#71

Ridge Racer Type 4

PLAYSTATION, 1998

Presumably still smarting from people loudly pointing out the original *Ridge Racer* arcade game only had a single track and a single car to drive, for the fourth home instalment of the series Namco responded with eight tracks, a vast narrative based career mode and an almost sarcastic 320 cars to collect. Not counting the secret bonus car shaped like Pac-Man, of course.

In fact, *Ridge Racer Type 4* was barely recognisable as a sequel to the original *Ridge Racer*. Far from the coin gobbling arcade experience, which probably lasted for less time than this game's long winded explanation of its arcane championship structure, *Type 4*'s intention was to tell a soap opera story. Picking one of the four teams available saw you thrust into a motorsport flavoured melodrama, whether that was a young team manager struggling to live up to her family legacy or a squad reeling from the tragic death of their star driver. These storylines acted as connective tissue between races and ended up becoming surprisingly involving as the career mode continued. And we promise we only giggled a little bit when we discovered that the name the Japanese developers had picked for the team manager of US team Dig Racing was 'Robert Chrisman'.

On track, your chances depended on which of those teams you'd chosen. Select Dig Racing, for example, and you'd end up battling against restrictive budgets and limited upgrades, forcing you to scrap for every position. If you were looking to eke out the best possible performance, you could choose your preferred fictional model of car based on whether you preferred grippy or drifty handling. Alternatively you could do what we used to do and choose it based on which had the silliest name. Will it be the Terrazi Ambitious or the Lizard Bonfire today? Choices, choices... **MIKE CHANNELL**

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7|8
RECORD
TIME LIMIT
402 mph
INSERT COIN
INSERT COIN

IMAGES: GETTTYW

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1.8T 4cyl	222 bhp	6.9 secs	32.1 mpg	1,376 kg

HERO Racecar looks, great driving position, old school experience

ZERO Light gearshift, firm ride, secondhand parts hard to come by

***TOCA RACE DRIVER 2*. THAT'S WHERE** this all started. I'd just hit double digits when it was released in 2004. I had a basic simulator setup: steering wheel attached to the desk, accelerator and brake pedals on the floor. No third pedal to worry about, wouldn't have known how. Couldn't drive back then.

Still, serious business for 10 year old me. And if there's one car that sticks in my head from it, it's the MkI Seat Leon Supercopa. This… isn't that, but it is the basis for that racecar. So today, I'm excited. Except, despite this summer being the hottest on record, it's been raining cats and dogs all morning. And I've asked owner Nathan to drive all the way from his Liverpool home to meet me in Bedfordshire… a 350 mile, six hour round trip. Rotten luck.

Fortunately, the sun decides to show its face around the time he shows up. And I'm immediately relieved to hear that despite its seemingly immaculate condition, this is no garage queen. Since buying this car a few years back, Nathan has made the trip to the Le Mans 24 Hour Race three times with his son, where, he tells me, it regularly embarrasses more prestige cars with the attention it receives.

It's not hard to see why, because I'm immediately struck by how well its muscular looks have aged. Seat launched the MkI Leon Cupra in 1999 with a 1.8-litre turbo engine producing 178bhp. A couple of years later and having been busy with the spanners, the 207bhp Cupra R was released, which was then followed up by a 222bhp variant. This is the latter.

And not Nathan's first. Back in 2001 and driving a Vauxhall Corsa he hated, he walked in to a Seat dealership and drove away in a base 1.6-litre Leon. He then steadily worked his way up the range and bought his first Cupra R in grey in 2017. But when this glorious and increasingly rare yellow one popped up in 2022, he couldn't resist. Nathan tells me in its previous ownership it was treated to a respray to sort the sun fade, but it's otherwise completely original, including front splitter, suspension and exhaust. And it'll stay that way.

Inside feels a little more dated by comparison, but there's still plenty of nods to its racing pedigree, from the perfectly sized steering wheel with red 12 o'clock band, to the (originally optional) Recaro seats, to the rare as you like Cupra R chequered car mats, which these days

WORDS: PETER RAWLINS **PHOTOS:** JONNY FLEETWOOD
WITH THANKS TO: NATHAN PENNEY

“THE MORE YOU PUT YOUR TRUST IN IT, THE MORE IT REWARDS YOU”

Analogue dials? Tape deck? CD changer in glovebox? Tick, tick and tick

fetch hundreds of pounds. It’s surprisingly well equipped for a 20+ year old car too, including a six CD changer hidden in the glovebox.

Turn the key and it’s fairly restrained on startup, but I’m more immediately conscious of the heavy steering – fortunately, I at least manage to avoid stalling it when I have to make a three point turn in front of Nathan. Didn’t have to do that in *TOCA*.

Once out on the open road, the Cupra starts to show its hot hatchy-ness. The steering weight feels spot on out here, and while the gearshift is fairly light, the engine pulls impressively. Zero to 62mph takes 6.9secs – not massively quick by today’s hot hatch standards, but our perceptions of speed have been ruined by EVs anyway. Top speed is 150mph, but you needn’t reach for that, the turbo whoosh every time you hit 3,000rpm is infectious. As I grow in confidence, it responds – the more you put your trust in it, the more it rewards you. It’s gloriously raw, gloriously analogue, gloriously… old school.

And for that alone I’m glad I got to meet it. In the face of today’s cars that are increasingly devoid of any emotion, it’s a reminder of what we’re missing. Right, excuse me while I dust off the simulator. I’ve got some racing to do.

DRIVEN

HEAD TO HEAD

ELECTRIC FAMILY CHARIOTS

Families used to fit in hatchbacks. Now they need 2.5 tonne battle buses, apparently. So, which six seater jumbo EV is best?

WORDS GREG POTTS **PHOTOGRAPHY** JONNY FLEETWOOD

These are two extremely expensive family cars. There's no getting away from that fact. As you witness them on these pages, they're both in their top trim levels with their most potent powertrain options. On a three year PCP deal with an already chunky £10,000 deposit down and a 10,000 mile annual limit, the Hyundai Ioniq 9 in Calligraphy trim with a six seat layout would cost you just over £1k per month. Volkswagen's long wheelbase ID.Buzz GTX with the same people carrying ability wouldn't be too far behind, requiring 36 monthly payments of £825.

But wait, because these aren't just people carriers. They're supposed to be objects of desire. They're supposed to be cool. And don't scoff, because the Ioniq 5 has already proven that Hyundai can play that game.

The Ioniq 9 once again deploys those retrotastic 'parametric pixels' for its front and rear lights, while the shape is supposed to minimise drag with its raked windscreen and chopped, estate-like rear end. Much of the streamliner learnings apparently came from the Ioniq 6 saloon, and somehow Hyundai has managed to give this behemoth sibling a slippery drag coefficient of 0.26.

When I first saw the Ioniq 9 out in the US I liked the way it looked. Over there it offered something different to the boxy, truck based SUVs of the domestic market. And yet, now it's here in the UK I'm not so sure. Perhaps it's the overuse of the pixels, the eyebrows in the wheelarches or the £1,200 Gravity Gold matte paint? Or maybe it's just the sheer size of the thing. It's 8mm longer than a Range Rover and somehow makes even this stretched ID.Buzz look neat and compact.

Before Volkswagen finally brought back the Bulli in 2022, there hadn't been a genuinely cool VW since the Scirocco (RIP). But this is retro done right, with the electric underpinnings allowing for a flat floor and a short, stubby nose with minimal cooling. It wasn't until mid 2023 that we first saw the long wheelbase ID.Buzz, and March the following year was our first look at the hotter GTX, but neither update has hurt the styling. In fact I rather like the GTX's new smirking front bumper.

The long wheelbase treatment means it's a much more flexible family car too, with the choice of either six or seven seats rather than the standard five and big boot of the short wheelbase car. There's loads of glass filling the interior with light, and the GTX gets a giant panoramic roof as standard featuring 'smart glass' that switches from opaque to clear at the touch of a button.

Slight shame that you can't have any white paint as part of a classic two tone treatment on the sporty version, but this £2,791 Mono Silver/Cherry Red

WHAT ABOUT THESE?

VOLVO EX90 TWIN MOTOR PERFORMANCE

Think the Hyundai and VW are pricey? This starts at £82k but costs over £100k if you want the most potent powertrain and a couple of options

Price: £99,960

PEUGEOT E-5008 DUAL MOTOR

Stricter budget but still need seven seats and big EV power? Peugeot has just introduced a new 325bhp AWD motor powertrain for its largest SUV

Price: £58,990

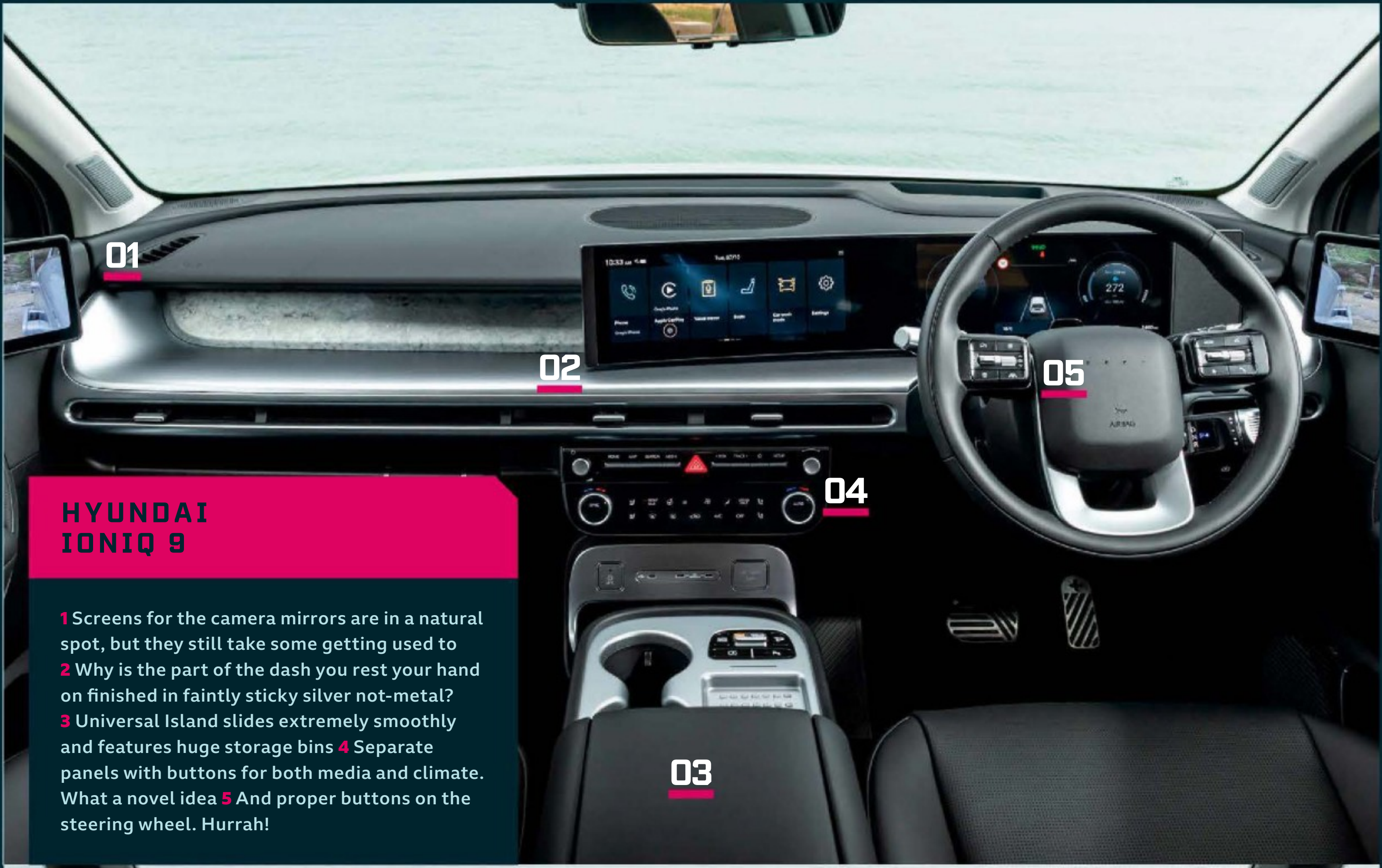
KIA EV9 GT-LINE AWD

Love the bones of the Ioniq 9 but want something less swoopy? The EV9 looks like a Stormtrooper's shoe and has the tech to back up its design

Price: £73,985

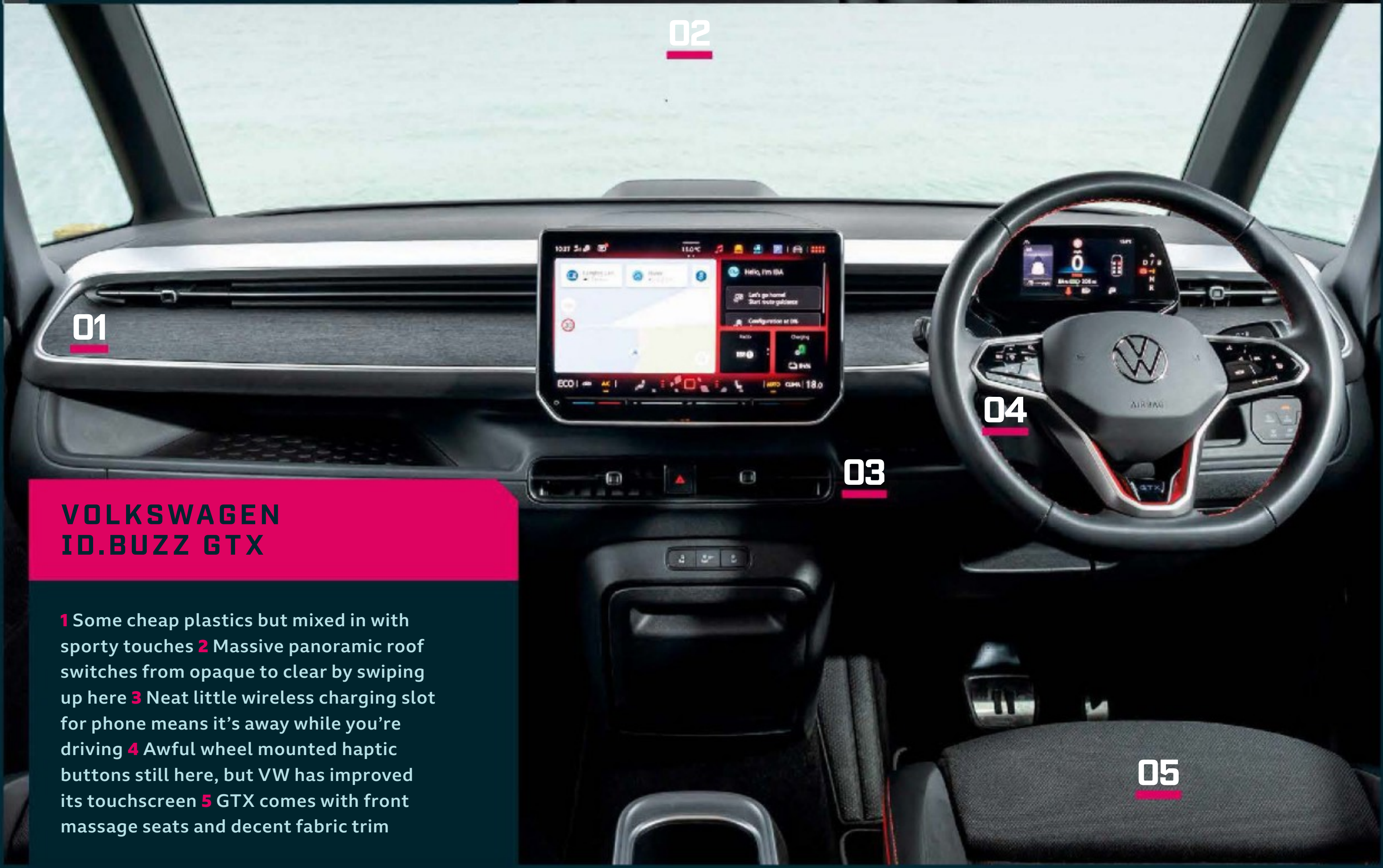
Glitzy Ioniq 9 looks somewhat out of place in the British countryside

“THESE AREN’T JUST PEOPLE CARRIERS. THEY’RE SUPPOSED TO BE OBJECTS OF DESIRE”



HYUNDAI IONIQ 9

1 Screens for the camera mirrors are in a natural spot, but they still take some getting used to **2** Why is the part of the dash you rest your hand on finished in faintly sticky silver not-metal? **3** Universal Island slides extremely smoothly and features huge storage bins **4** Separate panels with buttons for both media and climate. What a novel idea **5** And proper buttons on the steering wheel. Hurrah!



VOLKSWAGEN ID.BUZZ GTX

1 Some cheap plastics but mixed in with sporty touches **2** Massive panoramic roof switches from opaque to clear by swiping up here **3** Neat little wireless charging slot for phone means it's away while you're driving **4** Awful wheel mounted haptic buttons still here, but VW has improved its touchscreen **5** GTX comes with front massage seats and decent fabric trim combo is still plenty eye catching. Inside there's black cloth trim, but red stitching livens it up a bit and there's a sporty looking steering wheel. The haptic buttons that said wheel is saddled with are as frustrating as ever to use, but the 12.9in central infotainment screen is now much improved. It loads quickly, responds to your inputs promptly and features permanent climate controls and a speedy shortcut to the driver assist menu. Illuminated sliders underneath, too.

And while the rear doors and windows slide open electronically, the seats in the back of the Buzz are manual and super easy to fold, flip and slide. The six seater layout means you get two captain's chairs in the middle row and two slightly smaller seats in the rear, but even in that third row there's plenty of space for a 6ft adult. The trade off is a relatively small boot, with only 306 litres of space when the final row is in use. Even an ID.3 can comfortably beat that.

The Ioniq 9 deploys a similar layout but retains slightly more room for luggage when fully loaded with people (although it can't compete with the van shaped Buzz when seats start being folded). It too uses a 2-2-2 formation for seating, but if you want acceptable adult legroom in the third row then the middle won't be able to stretch out. It also gets a flat floor, but the seats are mounted lower so passengers will find their knees raised up round their ears. And there's a strange mix of methods to move said seats in this top spec Calligraphy model, so while the final row folds flat electronically the middle row is manual and rather fiddly. Confusing.

One thing that does slide gracefully is the centre console. Hyundai calls this the "Universal Island 2.0" and it's essentially a giant storage box that can move between the first and second rows. It also houses cupholders, a wireless charging pad and all the rear seat climate controls. Volkswagen offers something similar on the Multivan, but not on the ID.Buzz.

Hyundai gets a hearty pat on the back for its physical buttons too. There may be a large curved display with two 12in screens up front, but there are also dedicated panels for the climate and media controls, as well as proper buttons and rocker switches on the steering wheel. Hold the volume button to turn off the speed limit warning bong, then do the same with the little steering wheel icon to switch off the overeager lane assist. Easy.

Unfortunately, I didn't find the driving position all that comfortable in the Ioniq 9. Sure, the chairs are trimmed in Nappa leather and are heated, ventilated and massaging up front, but the headrest is far too stocky and the steering wheel doesn't offer enough reach adjustment, so you're left reaching for it while your legs bunch up against the pedals.

And we must talk about those cameras moonlighting as mirrors. Of course this contributes to the low drag coefficient, but it also spoils all of the usability created by fitting proper mirrors. The screens are mounted in a natural position and I'm sure you'd get used to them, but parallel parking a 5m long car using only cameras is a task I'd rather not undertake every day. Even judging distances for a supposedly simple lane change is tricky. Hyundai has stuck a guide on the display, but trusting that completely would require serious faith in technology.

Thankfully, even if you're pulling into the outside lane of a derestricted section of autobahn, you'll have plenty of grunt to get up to speed. This Performance AWD powertrain uses a motor on each axle for a combined 421bhp and a 0–62mph time that just sneaks in under five seconds. Power is delivered smoothly and without fuss, and it feels much better tied down than the prototype I drove last year. There's not so much dive under

IT'S ALL IN THE DETAILS

05
15.0°C
Lane Assist (lane keeping system)
Speed warning
Attention Monitor
Drowsiness Monitor
Front Assist (Automatic Emergency Braking)
ECO
A/C
AUTO

START
STOP
D
N P
R

1 Rear seats in the ID.Buzz are extremely easy to move and fold **2** The Hyundai's 52-litre frunk is useful for charging cables **3** Ioniq 9 gets 100W USB-C chargers that can juice a laptop using the high voltage battery **4** Both of these cars get 21in wheels, but the ID.Buzz wins the design war **5** No physical buttons to turn off speed limit warning bong and lane assist in VW. Hyundai has useful shortcuts

SPECIFICATIONS

	HYUNDAI IONIQ 9	WINNER VOLKSWAGEN ID.BUZZ GTX	TESTER'S NOTES
PRICE	£78,595 OTR (£80,931 as tested)	£68,045 OTR (£71,816 as tested)	
POWERTRAIN	Two e-motors, 106kWh	Two e-motors, 86kWh	*Hyundai only quotes a 110.3kWh gross figure for its battery capacity, but our estimate is that 106kWh is usable. Still far bigger than the VW's pack*
TRANSMISSION	1spd auto, AWD	1spd auto, AWD	*Both get twin motor powertrains and AWD. Neither will ever go off road, but it it does mean they can both tow. Buzz will pull 1,600kg, while the Ioniq can drag a 2,500kg braked trailer*
TOTAL POWER	421bhp	335bhp	*You're right, 335bhp is a whole lot of power for a van*
TOTAL TORQUE	516lb ft	413lb ft	*The Hyundai gets even more shove though...*
0-62mph	4.9secs	6.4secs	*A big family bus that can get to 62mph in under five seconds? The Buzz gets the sportier look, but the Hyundai will leave it behind off the line*
TOP SPEED	124mph	99mph	*Shock horror! German contender loses top speed battle. Although would you really want to top 100mph in a long wheelbase electric van?*
CLAIMED ECONOMY/RANGE	3.5mpkWh, 372 miles	3.0mpkWh, 282 miles	*Hyundai's swoopy shape and camera mirrors contribute to a 0.26 drag coefficient and far better efficiency. Although on test we saw 3.1mpkWh in the Ioniq 9 and 3.0mpkWh in the Buzz*
WEIGHT	2,689kg	2,919kg	*Nope, those aren't typos. The 4.9m long ID.Buzz really does weigh just under three tonnes when unladen*
BOOTSPACE	338 litres/ 908 litres (third row folded)	306 litres/ 1,340 litres (third row folded)	*Hyundai leaves more room for luggage if all seats are filled, but if you're only travelling as a family of four, the ID.Buzz wins the cargo space game*
VERDICT	*The Ioniq 9 feels premium and is far more refined than the ID.Buzz, but we didn't gel with it and the looks are polarising. Six seat layout and fancy Calligraphy spec makes it expensive and less effective as a family car*	*If the Hyundai is lacking in character, the ID.Buzz has it in spades. Perhaps you don't need the GTX version to ferry the family, but with its funkier looks and impressive performance, you'll probably want it*	
SCORE	7	8	/10

braking and it corners remarkably flat for a seriously hefty SUV, with the steering weighting up nicely as the speed rises. There are even paddles behind the wheel to adjust the level of regen braking. And yet, performance hasn't taken priority over comfort. The laminated glass, active noise cancelling tech and foam filled tyres all combine to reduce road and wind noise, making the cabin of the Ioniq 9 a serene place to spend time. The suspension is a fairly simple multi-link rear, MacPherson front setup and is all the better for it. No air suspension here. It deals well with bumps and lumps in the road, although on occasion it will remind you just how much this thing weighs with a hefty crash through a giant pothole.

The ID.Buzz can't match the big Hyundai for refinement. Its slab sided design and low profile tyres mean there's more noise transmitted into the cabin, but it's still light years ahead of the diesel engined, van based VW buses of yesteryear. It also has 335bhp being sent to all four wheels, so it's genuinely quick. Even in Normal mode its nose will perform a little upnod under throttle, and with a low centre of gravity it actually corners rather keenly. The driving position is pure van but it handles more like a passenger car and even offers a little bit of feedback through the steering. The combination makes it excellent fun.

As you might expect, the VW is also far easier to manoeuvre. In other markets around the world you can spec an Ioniq 9 with four wheel steering, but for some reason in the UK the fronts are required to do all of the work. That means it's got the turning circle of a cross Channel ferry. The ID.Buzz is heavier on paper but feels more nimble and is far easier to park. Important if the kids have been asking if you've almost arrived for the past hour and a half.

Once stopped and plugged in there's not much in it in terms of charging speeds. The Hyundai peaks at 233kW, while the Volkswagen can manage 200kW. Both can also be used as giant powerbanks to send electricity out the other way. Of course, the Ioniq 9 does have a considerably larger battery and claims 372 miles of range to the Buzz's 282 miles, but both were equally as efficient during our test with the Hyundai registering 3.1 miles per kWh and the VW 3.0. The GTX's range feels plentiful for a family bus, and the extra power and second motor only cost you five miles versus the rear wheel drive variant.

If you're regularly covering big distances then the Hyundai is probably the one to have here. It's more accomplished as a cruiser and more refined on the move, although I do have reservations about the driving position and would definitely not tick the £1,000 box for the digital side mirrors.

Although in all honesty, if I were choosing between the two I probably wouldn't even get that far on Hyundai's configurator, because the ID.Buzz is a car that gets under your skin and makes you smile. It's the one I'd really want to own, and if you're dropping this much cash on an electric car for the family then that really matters. Otherwise you'd just spend £30k on a seven seat Vauxhall Combo Life.

Volkswagen took the standard Buzz and made it far more practical with the addition of a long wheelbase variant, then it stuck on a sporty front bumper and plugged in an extra motor to make it even more enjoyable to drive. It's now properly fun for all the family.

"THE IONIQ 9 HAS GOT THE TURNING CIRCLE OF A CROSS CHANNEL FERRY"

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THE OVERRUN

Small but perfectly formed reviews. The best of this month's drives

8/10

CHEVROLET CORVETTE E-RAY

£153,440

6.2 V8 hybrid | 635 bhp | 2.9 secs | 22.4 mpg | 289 g/km

IT'S AN ELECTRIFIED, 4WD Corvette with its engine in the middle and its steering wheel on the right. Yikes! The end result is good though, almighty in straights and trustworthy in corners – just beware its lively front end sniffing out camber on a tumultuous B road. It's a small blip in a car that otherwise monsters British lanes with more insouciance than you'd dare imagine. **SD**

6/10

CHANGAN DEEPAL 07

£39,925

80 kWh | 215 bhp | 7.9 secs | 112 mph | 295 miles

"A SENSE OF FUN" CLAIMS Changan. Well, it has a great stereo, its interior and exterior LEDs twinkle cheerily, and with ex-VW designer Klaus Zykoria helming Changan's CAD, it looks crisper than many of its kind. But mostly it's left brain: good safety ratings, space for everyone, long warranty, loads of kit, a headline grabbing price. It's not a total dirge to drive. But there are more spirited rivals. **PH**

HF-252-BE
7/10

NISSAN MICRA
£28,365

FOR Proven package, fuss free EV driving

AGAINST It's a Renault 5, but slightly more boring

USED TO BE EASY A DECADE AGO – YOU KNEW HOW A SITUATIONSHIP was going thanks to a Facebook status update – where are Nissan and Renault at? Certainly we wouldn't send them a joint Christmas card, but they must be coparenting the AmpR Small platform from the Renault 5, because the new sixth generation Nissan Micra is using it. In fact, Nissan's designers have updated the front and rear lights, a few body panels and the badges, but everything else is Exactly. The. Same. So much the same that we don't really have anything to say about the Micra, other than it's weird how they've managed to make it that smidge duller than the retro Renault 5. Do the 1980s lines really zhuzsh the experience up that much? Look – the Micra is a decent little car, we're just not quite sure why you'd buy one, it's not even like it's cheaper than the Renault. **SB**

52 kWh	148 bhp	8.0 secs	93 mph	260 miles

MERCEDES-BENZ GLS 450d
£110,800

WHEN MERC GAVE MOST OF ITS SUVs a refresh, the GLS – the largest of the lot – was treated to light cosmetic tweaks and a new steering wheel with capacitive touch pads. D'oh! Still chuffing massive too. Probably too big for the UK, although there is space for seven adults inside and its mild hybrid straight six diesel is plenty brawny. The ride is fabulously comfortable even with standard 22in wheels. **GP**

3.0TD 6cyl	362 bhp	6.1 secs	33.7 mpg	222 g/km

TOYOTA HILUX GR SPORT II
£49,750 plus VAT

TOYOTA'S DAKAR CASH SPINNER now gets even more aggressive looks, a raised ride height and wider track, though there's no improvement on the 2.8 diesel. It's still sorely missing reach adjustment in the steering column, the ride is as unsettled as ever and the touchscreen pretty naff. Costs more too, with double cab pickups now treated as cars rather than commercial vehicles. **PR**

2.8TD 4cyl	201 bhp	10.7 secs	28.2 mpg	250 g/km

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8/10

KIA
EV4
£37,695

FOR It's a hatch! Super comfy. Long wheelbase gives space

AGAINST Under damped for quick B-roads

81.4 kWh	204 bhp	7.7 secs	106 mph	388 miles

KIA IS VERY GOOD AT SOLID EVs THAT FIT NEATLY into your life. And here's another one. In a world trammelled by crossovers, we're loving that the EV4 has the proportions of an old school hatch, albeit restyled for our age. Kia has an utterly distinctive design identity these days, so you won't mistake the EV4 for anything else.

Hang on though. Didn't Kia already have a first division electric hatch? Ah, the EV3, and it's only a few quid cheaper than the EV4. Well yes, but the EV4 is noticeably lower to the roof, and has an extra 140mm in the wheelbase, which gives it far more stretchy rear legroom.

Your passengers will be glad of the space because they'll be there a while. Range is 388 miles WLTP – likely knocking on towards 300 even on the motorway. There's also a 58.3kWh battery, saving £3,000, that gets 273 miles WLTP. The battery sizes conveniently match those in the VW ID.3. The EV4 lacks the big Kias' 800V system and ultra fast charging. Even so, 31 minutes 10–80 per cent is very decent given how much range you're actually adding.

Never mind the brutalist polygon heavy exterior, indoors there's a real plush feeling, with light coloured materials, lots of soft surfaced stuff, embracing seats and a storage console that's more like furniture. Kia's operating system is one of the most rational. The screens aren't vast, and that's fine, but there are lots of them. They act fast. The top version gets a HUD too. It's quite a feat of design to maintain the cool minimalist look while still including a really useful selection of hardware buttons and switches.

Down the road it's equally plush. It's very softly suspended and damped, serving up a lovely cushioned isolation from potholes, harshness and loud surfaces. But if things start to dip and buck underneath, like British rural roads do, it can get a bit nautical in the EV4, heaving and corkscrewing. Didn't they think of adaptive dampers? Still, on smooth roads it's well behaved – even fun – in corners. Push hard and the steering begins to speak of the grip beneath.

Accelerator and brakes are calibrated to make smooth driving a cinch, and performance is as per expectations given 201bhp is up against nearly two tonnes. Kia's electric tech is both well advanced and well trusted, and they have a habit of coming closer in the real world to their WLTP mileages. So that's reassuring.

Actually pretty much everything about the EV4 is going to soothe you. Don't imagine the slightly idiosyncratic design is wrapping a spiky car. They say overpowered in yer face crossovers are 'lifestyle vehicles'. But if your lifestyle is stretched and tense, the unaggressive and companionable EV4 could be just the balm you need. **PH**

RE25 GWW
7/10

JEEP AVENGER 4XE NORTH FACE

£35,725

1.2 3cyl hybrid	134 bhp	9.5 secs	52.3 mpg	122 g/km

THE CURIOUS CAR/FASHION TIE UP MAY NO longer be commonplace, but Stellantis still has faith. Following the Fiat 500 Giorgio Armani is this more rugged Avenger. It gets seats inspired by North Face puffers, Mont Blanc silhouettes etched everywhere and a tent in the boot. Beneath is the same, agile little Avenger we rather like, here with 4WD hybrid power though more modest off road reach than a Wrangler. Charming, but then so are cheaper Avengers. **SD**

IN Q 3308
7/10

AUDI Q3

£42,000

2.0T 4cyl	201 bhp	7.1 secs	36.1 mpg	178 g/km

AUDI'S FOURTH LARGEST SELLER IN BRITAIN, emboldened for its third generation. Its design looks new but the petrol and PHEV powertrains beneath are familiar from its VW Group cousins. There's a diesel too, but most UK buyers will flock to the petrols, and the 2.0 TFSI boasts tidy quattro handling for the full SUV experience. Fresh tech flourishes include Micro LED lights and a smartly reinvented indicator stalk – but the bones of the Q3 are reassuringly familiar. **SD**

ASTON MARTIN DBX S

£210,000

FOR Sharp handling, performance, looks great

AGAINST Expensive to buy and to run

4.0TT V8	717 bhp	3.3 secs	19.8 mpg	tbc g/km

POWER GAMES. ASTON MARTIN'S OFF roader gets a hike from 697 to 717bhp, enough to eclipse the Ferrari Purosangue – by 2bhp – although both the Lamborghini Urus SE and Porsche Cayenne Turbo e-Hybrid get more.

The S is notably lighter than before. That said, you have to pay more for the key weight saving kit, principally the carbon fibre roof (£5k). It saves 18kg, and because it's at the top of the car helps reduce the overall centre of gravity. Also on the menu are 23in magnesium wheels (£15k) which save 19kg compared to the regular aluminium ones. In full skinny spec, Aston says the DBX S now weighs 2,198kg. Which, in an era of elephantine EVs, is actually pretty good. There are also various, mostly welcome visual tweaks (the quad exhaust outlets sit vertically rather than horizontally).

The DBX S's extra 20bhp is useful if not exactly transformative (the torque is unchanged at 664lb ft). Zero to 62mph (3.3secs) and top speed (193mph) remain unchanged, but the S shaves 0.3sec off the old model's 0–124mph time. It's also terrific at motorway speeds, quiet and composed even on the 23in wheels.

The active centre transfer case varies drive from 47/53 front to rear in everyday GT mode, but stick it in Sport+ and it's 100 per cent rear driven. There's much fun to be had. Brake actuated torque vectoring and a 48V electronic anti-roll system sharpen the dynamics. But there's no active rear axle. The DBX S's steering is four per cent faster, a marginal gain Aston says improves the car's turning circle by almost half a metre. The brakes use carbon ceramic discs all round, 420mm at the front, 390mm at the rear.

Inside, it's more or less DBX 707. It feels tactile and expensive, and there's a solid emphasis on physical switchgear. The Bowers & Wilkins audio is majestic. Also useful is Apple's CarPlay Ultra, which means you're not flicking in and out of the UX when you need to find something on the car's built in system.

The S doesn't radically overhaul the DBX but it underlines its core attributes – it's fast, agile and extrovert when you want it to be, refined and amiable when you don't. Aston shifts around 3,000 DBXs annually, so this refresh is significant. **JB**

GARAGE

INCLUDING

TOYOTA LAND CRUISER · DACIA BIGSTER · JEEP WRANGLER · JAECOO 7 · MINI COUNTRYMAN · VOLVO EX30 · BENTLEY CONTI GT · RICCI'S GARAGE · PORSCHE MACAN · VOLKSWAGEN ID.BUZZ

REPORT 4

“The further we go, the more the road twists, undulates and muddies”

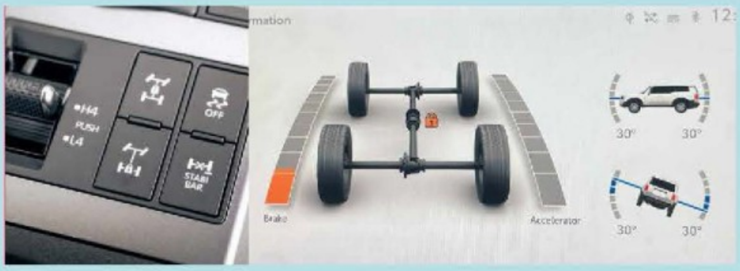
TOYOTA LAND CRUISER

£82,845 OTR/£82,845 as tested/£1,049 pcm

WHY IT’S HERE:

It’ll conquer the wilderness, but is this £83k Toyota everyday overkill?

DRIVER: ANDY FRANKLIN



THE 67 MILE A3 ISN’T EXACTLY celebrated as one of Britain’s great driving roads. It’s better known as ‘the bloody A3’, a vital artery linking London and Portsmouth. The sort of road you take because you have to, not because you’ve read about it in car magazines.

Yet it does have its place in motoring history. It was on the A3 near Guildford in 1959 that Formula One champion Mike Hawthorn tragically lost his life.

On a lighter note, in 2011 the A3’s route celebrated a momentous day in its centuries of history – the opening of the £370 million Hindhead tunnel. At 1.2 miles, it’s the longest non-estuarial road tunnel in the UK. It’s an engineering feat that finally sent the road under the Devil’s Punch Bowl rather than skirting the edge of this bizarre natural crater.

The result? Less traffic and pollution in Hindhead. Somewhere for Gordon Murray to sound check his V12 supercars. And above, the Punch Bowl restored to something approaching tranquillity.

Until I turn up. Satisfied the Land Cruiser is a worthy family car, I wanted to explore its other side. What better challenge than a spot of green laning? It sounds quaint but isn’t for the fainthearted. Fortunately we’ve got *TG*’s tame 4x4 guru Simon Bond on hand, who’s brought me to one of his local trails near to the Devil’s Punch Bowl, now mainly used by walkers and cyclists.

The Land Cruiser offers a couple of apps – Trailwise and Smart Trail – that show where you can legally drive, and even rates the difficulty of routes. Simon assures me he’s been this way before, though he does spend a worryingly long time finding the entrance. He’s brought along his tweaked 2001 Defender 110 with tyres that are considerably knobblier than the Toyota factory spec rubber on the Land Cruiser. As we finally reach the starting point I think to myself, “we go through there? In a car?” and begin to question what I’ve got myself into.

Still, I trust the Land Cruiser. I engage the locking differential and low range transmission by prodding buttons by the gearstick, then nose onto a ‘road’ barely wider than the car itself. Every parking sensor is screeching in protest, but the

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TOYOTA
GX74 ZGU
THE NATIONAL TRUST
DEVIL'S PUNCHBOWL

drivetrain ignores the tech and smoothly ambles on. The ride quality that sometimes jostles on the road suddenly makes sense – it's tuned to soak up punishment.

Soon enough, a proper rut appears. The Defender bucks and rocks violently, slipping and scrambling for grip. I follow with far less drama, the independent chassis keeping things composed. Simon looks impressed, if not a touch jealous. Handily, an overhead camera gives a ghosted view of the car, so you can check if you've driven over anything worrying.

Then comes a side slope. Simon wants to test roll stability. As I edge across, the off road display shows the angle climbing. We hit 30° – the Land Cruiser's max. Luggage slides across the boot, the engine note shifts, but I feel strangely calm. The further we go, the more the road twists, undulates, and muddies. Puddles test the brakes, which jitter uncomfortably underfoot – the one weak link in an otherwise flawless performance.

Eventually, the trail spits us out onto a more solid track, where we can clearly see the abandoned route of the old A3. The second half of the lane winds tighter still through the trees. I fold in the burly door mirrors to squeeze past, creeping along until the track finally opens out. Relief washes over me – and admiration too. The Land Cruiser has breezed through without fuss, living up to its reputation of taking the novice family man as deep off road as he's ever likely to go.

Much like the Hindhead tunnel many feet underneath us, it's a rugged, seamless feat of engineering that seems built to last.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 2755cc turbo diesel, AWD
PERFORMANCE: 202bhp, 369lb ft, 0–62mph in 10.9secs, 102mph
KERBWEIGHT: 2,520kg
ECONOMY: 26.4mpg, 280g/km CO_2

MILES SO FAR 16,500 **OUR MPG** 34.7

REPORT 2

AUDI S3

£53,530 OTR/£58,590 as tested/£682 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE:

To see if the S3 finally delivers as a driver's car

DRIVER: JETHRO BOVINGDON

A TRIP TO NORTH WALES beckoned. I took the twistiest route possible and it's a pretty epic drive, with at least half of the three hour journey on brilliant and mostly deserted roads. In wet conditions the S3 is unbelievably secure, very quick and enjoyable, too. But with its four wheel drive system and the trick new torque vectoring rear differential, it's a very different sort of hot hatch.

The aggressive, super pointy setup of old is replaced with a slightly more relaxed front end coupled to a greater emphasis on a neutral balance under power. The S3 wants to feel more rear driven. And if you get everything right the sensation of the outside rear tyre loading up with torque and then a little trace of power oversteer is fun.

However, for every perfect corner there are 10 where you might miss the razor sharp turn in of a focused front driver and another dozen where the S3 feels like it's doing a slightly contrived impression of a rear drive machine. So, no complaints about the sheer capability of the Audi, but at the moment it feels like it just needs a bit more bite and aggression.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 1984cc turbo 4cyl, AWD

PERFORMANCE: 329bhp, 310lb ft, 0–62mph in 4.7secs, 155mph

KERBWEIGHT: 1,610kg

ECONOMY: 32.6mpg, 197g/km CO_2

MILES SO FAR 1,770 **OUR MPG** 28.9

Akrapovič exhaust looks great, but the S3 is very, very quiet. We'd feel a little bit short changed for the £4,125 outlay

Turbocharged 329bhp 2.0-litre engine is smooth and strong. Chassis soaks it up, though. Maybe we're just missing the RS3's 5cyl?

S3 is highly configurable and Dynamic Plus does go some way towards giving a bit of edge

So. Much. Black. Plastic. Hard to even see the Audi four ring logo. A tad brutal for the more demure S3

REPORT 7

PORSCHE MACAN

£68,500/£73,612/£855

WHY IT'S HERE:

Is the basic Macan the best Macan?

DRIVER: BEN PULMAN

"I'M A BIG FAN OF ELECTRIC cars, actually – I've got an electric Porsche Macan, which I love." So said Rob Dickinson, founder and executive chairman of Singer, during *TG*'s 'Boss Chat' with Christian von Koenigsegg and Mate Rimac.

We first met in late 2014, when Singer had a mere handful of cars to its name. Times have changed, Singer has grown exponentially, and Rob's the last person I expected to be an EV proponent.

"It's been an interesting ownership experience, actually – it's our first electric vehicle. It was a no

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brainer that we went to Porsche really. I'm lucky enough to have what is perhaps the ultimate two car modern Porsche garage – I've got a 2018 GT3 Touring, which is the antidote to our Macan 4 Electric. And if we needed any proof that the electric revolution is a nuanced one, I think those two spell it out for me.

"But as I said during the [Boss] Chat, it's incredibly convenient. Generally, we're enjoying it, mainly for its convenience, mainly for its ability to be incredibly fast, incredibly discreetly. The ability to zip around, to find spots in traffic, without undue drama, is one of the things I like about it the most.

"But Porsche is clearly looking to define something that it has unavoidably lost with the democratisation of speed. All of these EVs are fast now, which is one thing Porsche had up its sleeve and mainstream cars didn't. Porsche is trying to find what makes a Porsche special when it's no faster than anything else. I would say the steering is very nice compared to other stuff I've driven, and the oily, highly developed touchpoints of a car make it feel like a Porsche."

Did a man whose company motto is 'Everything is important' buy it from dealer stock?

"No, we specced it! Black metallic, green leather interior, 22-inch wheels, done. I insisted we had to have the 22s, which bring the car a certain proportion that starts to make sense. But with those wheels comes the usual payback of bump/thump, the huge unsprung weight hanging off those axles is very evident when you hit the wrong obstacle.

"We have never used a charger, we just stick it in the garage and plug it in there. With radar cruise control, it's just so useful and easy and in certain circumstances you want easy. But when you want to drive a car and fill the thrill of life, you get in your GT3..."

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: single e-motor, 100kWh battery, RWD
PERFORMANCE: 355bhp, 415lb ft, 0–62mph in 5.7secs, 137mph
KERBWEIGHT: 2,220kg
ECONOMY: 3.34mpkWh, 393 miles

MILES SO FAR 6,572 **OUR MPKWH** 3.3

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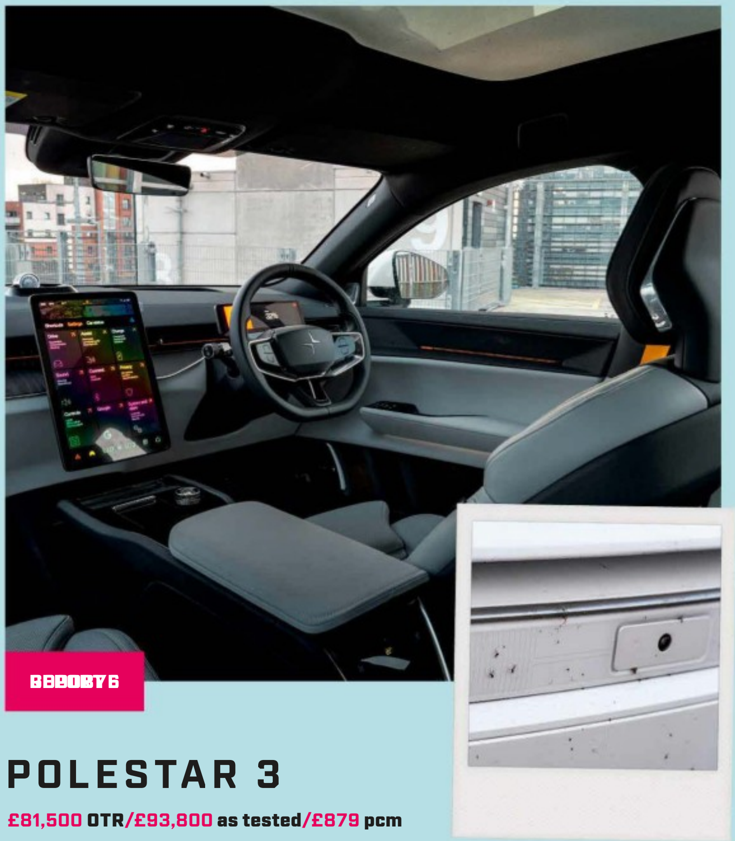


REPORT 6

POLESTAR 3

£81,500 OTR/£93,800 as tested/£879 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE:
Is the designery Polestar 3 an EV with real character?

DRIVER: *JASON BARLOW*

NEWS JUST IN: THE POLESTAR 3 is getting a big upgrade for 2026. Out goes the current Nvidia Xavier processor, incoming is the Orin, which ramps up the processing power from 30 to 254 trillion operations per second.

Polestar says the upgrade will mean faster, more intelligent management of active safety systems, battery performance and sensor data. Other changes include 'software refinement' for the steering. And it will be offered to existing Polestar owners as a complimentary 'retrofit'.

This constant, almost real time evolution of EVs is one of the trademarks of the emerging automotive era, and it's something tech types get all frothy about. Yet bizarrely it also feels like a throwback to the dark days of British Leyland. That was an era when cars would be launched before they were fully ready, and customers effectively became prototype drivers/guinea pigs. It didn't end well.

My experience living with the Polestar 3, described by its maker as the first European software defined vehicle, suggests that a certain amount of glitching is inevitable. All modern cars are so complex that some sensors are bound to have off days. But that doesn't half grate when the price is £94k...

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: two e-motors, 111kWh battery, AWD
PERFORMANCE: 510bhp, 671lb ft, 0–62mph in 4.5secs, 130mph
KERBWEIGHT: 2,584kg
ECONOMY: 3.1mpkWh, 348 miles

MILES SO FAR 4,750 **OUR MPKWH** 2.9

REPORT 4

VOLVO EX30

£37,260 OTR/£39,850 as tested/£615 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE:
Does the EX30 deserve all the accolades?

DRIVER: *VIJAY PATTNI*

MEET MOOSE. MOOSE IS AN 11 WEEK OLD GOLDEN retriever, and was recently privy to a ride in the Volvo EX30, because vet, and therefore had the opportunity to experience – literally for the first time in his little life! – the eerily silent acceleration offered up by the single motor, RWD hatchback.

We've long passed the point where manufacturers treated an EV's accelerator like an on/off switch, and the EX30's pedal is nicely modulated. It rides really nicely too. It's not Citroen spongy, but feels polished and well damped.

Does this mean it's a boring car? On the one hand, it's hugely fast. The steering doesn't offer any feedback, and even when you've got it in the heaviest of three settings, feels unnatural. But it's accurate. Turn in, hold yer line out the other end.

On the other hand, it all feels a tad... distant. Like the action is happening a layer removed from you. It's got grip, but there's no real interaction. It's agile and doesn't roll, but it's also not massively communicative. With all the emphasis on that screen, it wouldn't have hurt to code in a little more excitement as an option. Still, Moose managed not to get car sick. Good boy.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: two e-motors, 86kWh battery, AWD
PERFORMANCE: 335bhp, 413lb ft, 0–62mph in 6.4secs, 99mph
KERBWEIGHT: 2,919kg
ECONOMY: 3.0mpkWh, 280 miles

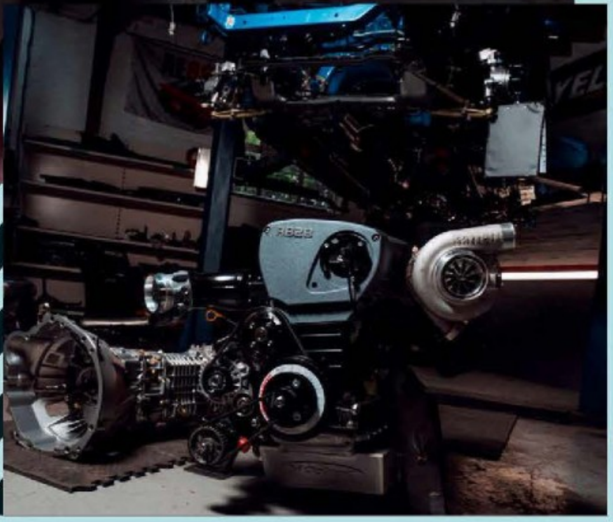
MILES SO FAR 3,012 **OUR MPKWH** 3.6

SKYLINE GT-R
RB28
Garrett
DAMPER

Ricci's GARAGE

REPORT 64

THIS MONTH: THE R34'S ENGINE… IT'S ONLY BLOOMING HERE!



Your eyes do not deceive you. I repeat, your eyes are not deceiving you. Pictured here is an actual engine for my R34 GT-R Skyline – one with a crank, working pistons the lot. And I've seen and photographed it myself, otherwise you'd be forgiven in thinking this build was AI generated vapourware.

The excitement is also very real. There is some fear obviously – not the fact that I want to try and run it at 1,000bhp – but more the fact the setup here cost more than what I paid for the R34 GT-R back in 2018. And they weren't exactly dirt cheap then either.

But there's a very good reason for sinking a good car payment into an engine build. This isn't the first engine rebuild I've funded; it's number five, and after four failed attempts which I probably should've learned from, this particular build will be the last engine my GT-R ever needs. Because if anything happens to it, I will be treating the car to a Viking burial near Rutland Water.

Some of those rebuilds were my fault, but the bulk were down to shoddy workmanship from previous tuners. Enough time has passed for the rage to subside and to cut my losses with the old setup, which is exactly why every single component in this Dahtone Racing wide journal RB28 is brand new. And that includes the engine block and cylinder head, which weren't the easiest to track down as new-old stock either.

So, what are we looking at? The stock RB26 is now a 2.8-litre but unlike other stroker kits, Dahtone retains the OEM piston size (86mm) which means that no overboring is required with the engine block and that crucially retains much more strength when aiming to run it at a thousand horsepower. Will it be reliable at that power? Who knows, but every engine I had before at lower levels went bang so we might as well find out one way or another.

The Getrag six speed gearbox has also been rebuilt and the twin plate carbon clutch refreshed, meaning that any day now Steve and his team at SR Autobodies will be plonking it back into the car. The first time it'll have had an engine in it since October 2021.

Excited? You bet, even if there is still a whole load of expense left to hose at it. I need to sort the injectors, wiring, intercooler and turbo side as a priority. But once the block is popped back in, the GT-R can begin to resemble a real car once again and even stand on its own four wheels again. Which is more than can be said for my E24 M6 rebuild currently, which might need rescuing in the next month, so it doesn't disappear altogether. Balls.

Renowned photographer Mark has been working with* TopGear *for many, many years. When not taking photos he's buying inappropriate cars. Here he shares his addiction with the world

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STORM
JEEPS
RX25 GCY

REPORT 3

JEEP WRANGLER

£65,870 OTR/£69,335 as tested/£609 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE:
Is living with a cartoonishly rugged American icon in the UK charmingly adventurous or just a recipe for discomfort?

DRIVER: ROWAN HORNCASTLE

A QUID PRO QUO OF RUNNING THE Jeep Wrangler was that we could modify it. Which isn't just music to our ears, but also makes complete sense. Why? Because it's a Wrangler. The last of its breed, a car that still believes the Earth is flat and that traction should be earned, not programmed.

If you scroll through the #Wrangler hashtag on Instagram, you'll see that – in the US especially – you're pretty much in the minority if you don't have a modified one. Either a hard as nails lifted 'Street Jeep', or something that could winch itself out of the Mariana Trench. Because there appears to be one rule: you don't modify a Wrangler to make it better – you modify it to make it more. More clearance, more grip, more lights, more gear. The same attitude, just dialled up for more capability. Well, that's what we're going for.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 1995cc 4cyl turbo, AWD
PERFORMANCE: 272bhp, 295lb ft, 0–62mph in 7.4secs, 99mph
KERBWEIGHT: 2,047kg
ECONOMY: 23.0mpg, 269g/km CO_2

MILES SO FAR 10,530 **OUR MPG** 25.8

TO BEGIN THE TRANSFORMATION...
We trekked to Yorkshire (picking up a windscreen crack) to visit Storm Jeeps. The man behind it all is Andy. He and his dad started a club – Jeepey – that spiralled into a parts business and, in 2016, into Storm, the UK's go-to for proper off road Jeep builds. And over a day and a bit, Andy and his mechanic Sam began our Jeep's glow up.

▶ STEP 1: WHEELS AND TYRES

The Wrangler rolled in on its factory wheels and 255/75R17 BFGoodrich KM2s tyres. Decent enough, but as the seasons changed, braking distances suffered. So, in come 315/70R17 BFGoodrich KO2s, mounted to Warn's Diamond Cutter wheels.

▶ STEP 2: TRACK BAR RELOCATION BRACKET

Here comes the only mod that needs proper tools – everything else is bolt on, bolt off. To accommodate the 2.5-inch lift kit we're fitting, we need to address the axle's geometry. So, Sam drills two new holes into the axle and fits a track bar relocation bracket.

▶ STEP 3: SUSPENSION

The standard suspension is unceremoniously binned in favour of a full ARB Old Man Emu 2.5-inch lift kit. The kit includes longer springs, uprated shocks, extended sway bar links, adjustable lower control arms, plus bump stop extensions.

▶ STEP 4: BUMPER

Time for some facial surgery – and to sort out that awful plastic underbite of the standard bumper. Off comes the factory 'diving board' and in its place goes the ARB Stealth Recovery Bumper – a lighter, cleaner, and better designed piece with a 38° approach angle.

▶ STEP 5: WINCH

Into the bumper slides the build's visual hero, the Warn Zeon XD winch. It's IP68 waterproof (meaning fully submersible), uses synthetic rope (safer and easier than steel cable), and has LED lights on the motor body that change colour depending on temperature.

▶ STEP 6: LIGHTS

"A lot of people are obsessed with lights," Andy says. "We've had builds with 30+ lights. But it's usually all for show." We decided to keep it simple. Just a pair of ARB Intensity Solis 7in LED driving lights on the bumper – still bright enough to cause migraines, mind.

▶ STEP 7: SNORKEL

Have you even modified a 4x4 if you haven't added a snorkel? Answer: no. The Bravo snorkel we've fitted snakes through the inner wing with no bodywork cuts. From the outside, it's discreet. From the inside, it delivers a soft whoosh and cleaner, cooler air.

▶ STEP 8: STEERING DAMPER

Big tyres equals more tramlining. So Sam fits a gas charged steering damper. Unlike the stock unit, this one doesn't fade or rebound under stress. It brings a calming consistency to the front end – less kickback, more control.

▶ STEP 9: FENDER FLARES

If your wheels stick out past your arches, you're begging for MoT test failure pain. So Sam fits a set of Duratrail extended fender flares, matching the factory look.

▶ STEP 10: CALIBRATION

Once everything's bolted on, Andy dives into the footwell, finds the OBD port and updates the rolling circumference, shift points, and tyre pressures. Next, the headlights are realigned, the speedo gets a recalibration, and the tyre pressures are adjusted to suit the new rubber. Meanwhile, Sam torques every bolt back together. Each component is marked with a paint pen – a simple trick that acts like a mechanical lie detector.

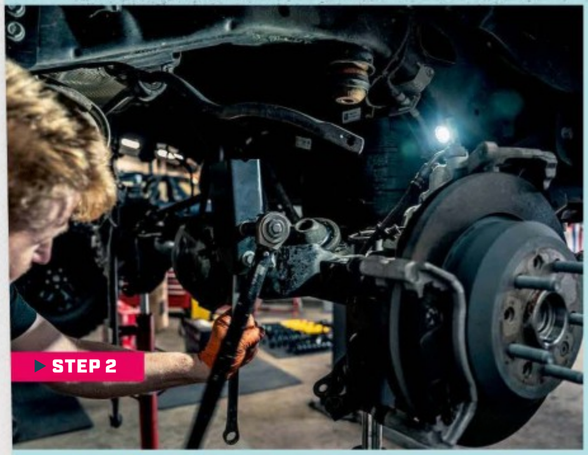
▶ THE RESULT

What we're left with is a Wrangler that's tougher, taller and more capable. Storm has been fantastic. Cost?

"We've had 30 odd grand builds," says Andy. "But most are between £10k–15k." Ours? Around £12,000.

So what's next? Well, there's a new set of tyres on. Let's not waste them on tarmac.

STEP 1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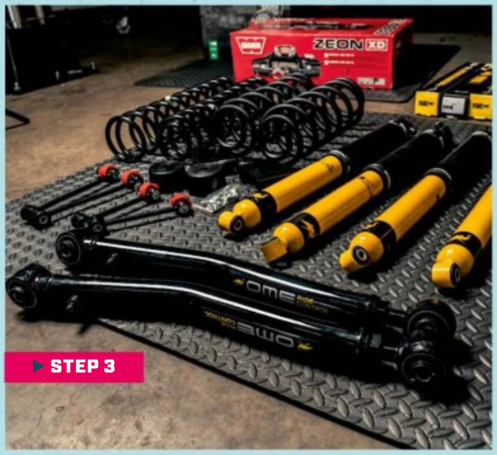
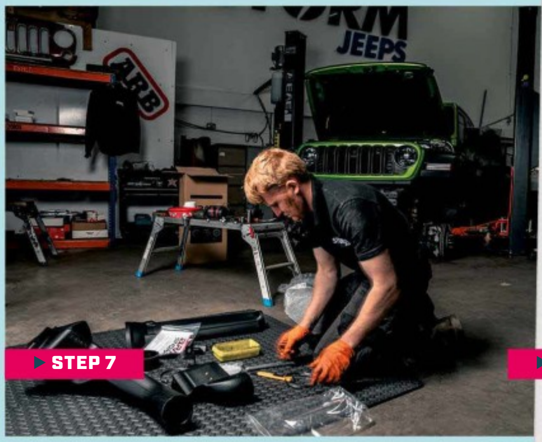


STEP 3

STEP 4

WARN
ZEON XD 10-S
WARN
STEP 5

STEP 6



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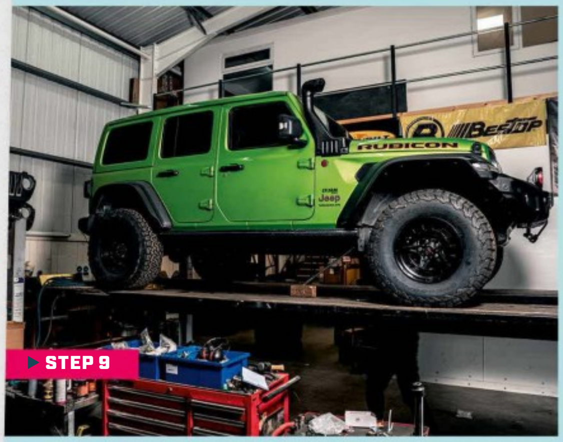
STEP 8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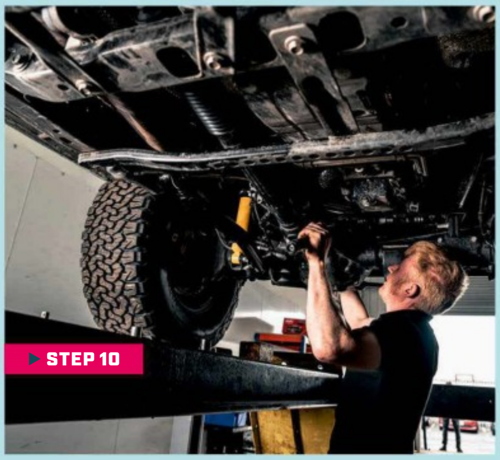
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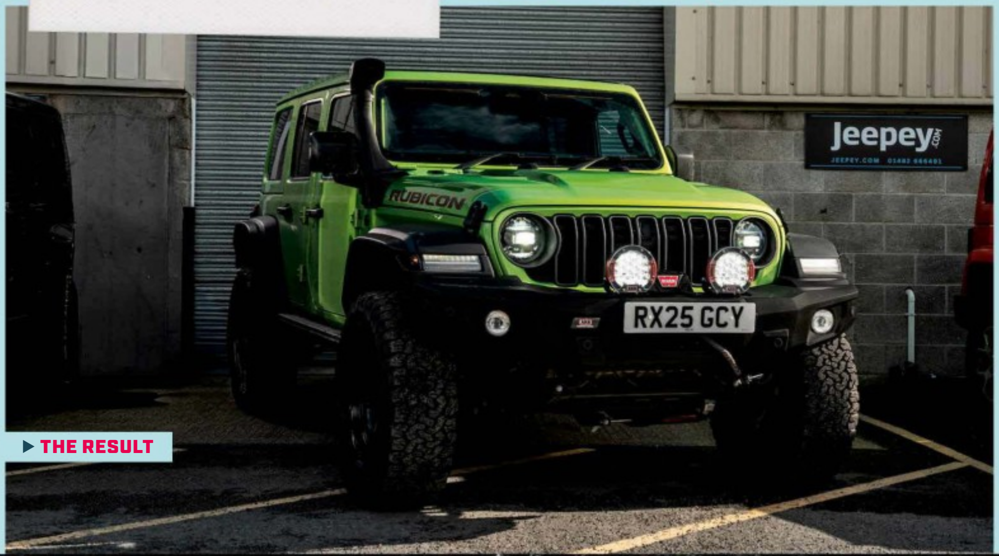
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THE RESULT

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REPORT 5

MINI COUNTRYMAN

£29,100 OTR/£39,700 as tested/£695 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE: Is the largest Mini ever overinflated or a big success?

DRIVER: *ESTHER NEVE*

SORRY BUT THE TIME HAS COME to discuss the things that get my goat about the Countryman.

First – I'm not a fan of the looks. To me the previous generation looked far more svelte and appealing. This one is just too chunky and flabby, it has lost the cuteness the old one had.

Second – those eight thrilling experience modes... seriously, what is the point of them? How many people actually swap and change between them?

Third – the warning bongs drive me to distraction. And yes, I do know that this criticism is not exclusive to Mini, it is something that can be levelled at pretty much all new cars. It's a trend that really has to be stopped.

Fourth – the emergency braking system that shudders you to a halt when you're reversing toward a flotilla of floaty flowers. Deary me, I nearly have a full blown heart attack each time the car jerks to an unpleasant halt.

Fifth – the Countryman's auto gearbox is sadly nowhere near as smooth and fuss free as the other autos I've had in my recent lifers.

In the interest of fairness there are many great things too – good space, passengers find it's comfortable, its heritage, the list goes on. But sometimes you just have to point out the quibbles.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 1499cc turbo 3cyl mild hybrid, FWD
PERFORMANCE: 168bhp, 207lb ft, 0–62mph in 8.3secs, 132mph
KERBWEIGHT: 1,620kg
ECONOMY: 47.1mpg, 136g/km CO_2

MILES SO FAR 5,800 OUR MPG 47.4

REPORT 2

DACIA BIGSTER

£24,995/£26,700/£114

WHY IT'S HERE: Value motoring for a decently sized SUV. But is the Bigster bigster value or just cheap?

DRIVER: *TOM FORD*

IT'S BEEN A BIG MONTH FOR THE Bigster, some 3,200 miles in the past four weeks. Obviously this isn't a mega distance cruiser, but it's been really very good. Space in the boot is good but not epic (although hallelujah, the Bigster comes with a space saver spare wheel which eats some of the underfloor), rear legroom excellent. The seats could be more supportive for larger frames, especially on the base, there are a couple of small trim squeaks that need some smoothing in the dash and I've already fitted some liners to the cupholders and door bins, and the reversing camera is low enough resolution that you worry about your eyesight, but otherwise very happy. And it simply won't do less than 51mpg even if it's battered down a motorway.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 1793cc 4cyl + two e-motors, FWD
PERFORMANCE: 140bhp, 152lb ft, 0–62mph in 10.1secs, 105mph
KERBWEIGHT: 1,350kg
ECONOMY: 55.3mpg, 114g/km CO_2

MILES SO FAR 8,023 OUR MPG 52.3

WHAT ELSE WE'RE RUNNING

REPORT 9

BMW M5 TOURING

I don't think the M5 is a classic piece of design, but it is modernist and of its time. I'm beginning to think of it as the Mansoryisation of everything. But dawn light in southern France does help soften the monolithic lines. And while I was there taking pics, I bumped into a *TG* subscriber. *Merci*, Fabien! OM

REPORT 6

RENAULT 5

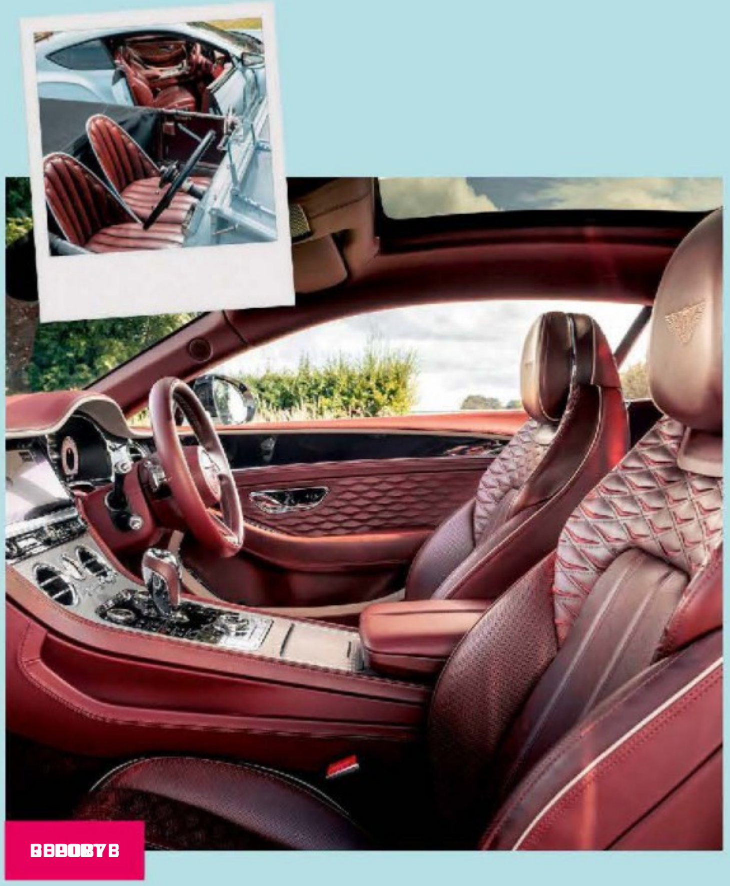
Mostly because Greg and I live 100 miles apart (and not at all because he's selfishly hoarding *TopGear*'s 2024 Car of the Year) I hadn't spent any decent time in *TG*'s Renault 5. So I stole it. It can't be as near perfect as Greg reckons… can it? Discover my full verdict on TopGear.com. OK

THRUSTON
PROFESSIONAL
Intercomp
736.0
693.5
690.0
748.0
SELECT: 2867.5100.00%
TOTAL: 2867.5 kgs

REPORT 5

VOLKSWAGEN ID.BUZZ

Weight is something we've learned to swallow with EVs, a necessary byproduct of a usable range. The Buzz is clearly no ballerina, but just to be sure we stuck it on the scales where it clocked 2,867kg – that's 50kg under its claimed kerbweight. Perhaps it's the missing seat in the second row, or perhaps VW put helium in the tyres? JK



REPORT 8

BENTLEY CONTINENTAL GT

£254,200 OTR/£282,000 as tested/£5,077 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE: What has a hybrid makeover – and Mulliner buffing – added to the world's best GT?

DRIVER: OLLIE KEW

IT'S FAIR TO SAY THIS BENTLEY'S spec hasn't met with universal approval – including from me. However, there's historical interest at play here.

The paintwork is called Bedford Grey, weirdly. Bentley was founded in Cricklewood, north London and has been headquartered in Crewe, Cheshire since World War Two. So the reference is lost on me. It'll also set you back £18,775.

The moody Mulliner Blackline specification deletes almost all of the chrome adornments – a shame in my personal opinion – but this is one of the most popular options in Europe, the US and beyond.

The Oxblood Red heritage leather isn't your usual cow hide, but a toughened, weatherproof version newly formulated for Mulliner. It harks back to the days of the Bentley boys, when it was likely the upholstery would get wet, then bleached by the sun.

But because this is a coupe, it doesn't need a weatherproof interior. And although I've been using the car intensely I'm a few decades short of being able to 'wear in' the upholstery.

So, *TG* consumer advice top tip time. If you're buying a Bentley as a treat, stick to normal leather. Only tick the heritage box if you're in the market for an heirloom for the great-grandchildren.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 3996cc TT V8 + e-motor, AWD
PERFORMANCE: 771bhp, 738lb ft, 0–62mph in 3.2secs, 208mph
KERBWEIGHT: 2,459kg
ECONOMY: 27.4mph, 29g/km CO_2

MILES SO FAR 8,847 **OUR MPG** 35.0

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JAECOO
LL74 YLT

REPORT 5

JAECOO 7

£35,165 OTR/£35,765 as tested/£560 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE: To discover what it's like to live with an oddball Chinese SUV

DRIVER: *SAM PHILIP*

JAECOO HAS EXISTED FOR A MERE 18 months. And it has been selling cars in the UK for less than half that time. So, if you're considering buying a Jaecoo 7 – or indeed the upcoming Jaecoo 5 – how can you be certain the company's actually going to stick around, and not simply vanish into the ether?

It's a question equally applicable to any of the other upstart (mostly Chinese) brands launched in the UK recently: Leapmotor, Skywell, Xpeng, some others I may have forgotten. I quizzed Jaecoo in search of answers, and here's what I found. You can indeed have some faith Jaecoo won't dissolve into thin air, because it's spent – to use the technical financial term – an absolute s**t ton of money putting down UK roots.

Jaecoo's not some fly by night startup. It's a sub-brand of Chery, the Chinese megacorp that – across its various marques – sold 2.6m cars globally in 2024. Chery has dropped well in excess of £30m solely on the aftersales element of establishing Jaecoo and sister brand Omoda in the UK. Total UK investment is many times that figure.

A chunk of that cash has been spent going dealer crazy. Jaecoo only started selling cars in the UK from February 2025, but already it's up past 80 dealerships – more than Subaru, Tesla or Alfa Romeo. Tough for those to vanish overnight.

Also in the name of inspiring confidence, the J7 gets a chunky seven year/100,000 mile warranty. Jaecoo highlights that – unlike some manufacturer warranties – it covers the infotainment system. Which is good to know.

Of course, none of this investment guarantees longevity. We live in volatile times. The future is unknown. But whatever the next decade brings, I suspect Jaecoo's more likely to be around at the end of it than a number of far longer established brands.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 1500cc 4cyl + e-motor, FWD
PERFORMANCE: 201bhp, 228lb ft, 0–62mph in 8.5secs, 108mph
KERBWEIGHT: 1,795kg
ECONOMY: 403mpg, 23g/km CO_2

MILES SO FAR 3,420 **OUR MPG** 51.0

GOODBYE

“I love the idea, but I’m not persuaded by the execution”

MG CYBERSTER

£54,995 OTR/£55,540 as tested/£970 pcm

WHY IT’S HERE: Because it’s quite simply the only purely electric sports car in the world (for now…)

DRIVER: *Ollie Kew*

I LIVED WITH AN MG CYBERSTER for six months, averaging over 1,000 miles a month. I have drawn two conclusions from this.

Should you buy this car? In its current form, no. Should MG have made this car, and should it continue to develop it? Absolutely. Essentially, I love the idea, but I’m not persuaded by the MkI Cyberster’s execution.

So, this brings me to my Cyberster conclusion. Like I said, right now this isn’t the finished article. But there’s potential here. The to do list?

1 Send it to Lotus or Prodrive for a handling setup. It’s unlikely to come back a Cayman and A110 beater, but at least tie down the lardy body control and inject some life to the corpselike steering.

2 Throw all the screens in the bin and start again. Make sure the new interface can be read without playing hide and seek with the steering wheel.

3 Code a new app and make sure anything you can adjust in the car (satnav, temperature, charging target) can be adjusted from a phone.

4 Find a way to mount the seat lower – and ask someone who knows how to make great seats where to put the bolsters and stuffing. Volvo would do.

5 Buy an old Boxster, dismantle the roof and learn how Porsche makes soft-tops that don’t rattle. If the budget is running a little dry by this point, try an MX-5 instead.

See, I could be all snarky and rude and laugh at MG for even bothering. MG doesn’t need the Cyberster after all. It’s already in the UK top 10 bestselling car charts, doing a roaring trade.

But I think MG *does* need this car. We need more mould breaking EVs. EVs are interesting when they *don’t* try to be like all the other cars. And you could never accuse the Cyberster of that.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: single e-motor, 74kWh battery, RWD

PERFORMANCE: 335bhp, 350lb ft, 0–62mph in 5.0secs, 121mph

KERBWEIGHT: 1,885kg

ECONOMY: 4.2mpkWh, 316 miles

MILES SO FAR 13,161 **OUR MPKWH** 3.4

CLEAN SLATE: AUDI'S REINVENTION STARTS HERE (DON'T CALL IT IT)
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THE HOT LIST

CITY CARS

TG TIP
Entry level **Red** trim is all the Panda you really need – and it comes on cool white steel wheels

1

FIAT GRANDE PANDA

PRICE: £20,975–£23,975

The Panda was distinctly endangered for a while there (though you can still buy the old petrol one in Italy), but it's been given a new lease of life with an electric powertrain. It's cheap, sure, but it's really well thought out and plenty stylish

Aimed at: dolce vitas

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

KIA PICANTO

PRICE: £16,065–£19,615

Fizzy, frugal and fun to drive, the tiny Picanto has really evolved over its three generations. The latest version is stylish and surprisingly well kitted out too

Aimed at: learners

3

DACIA SPRING

PRICE: £14,995–£16,995

This is the cheapest electric car on sale, and despite the low price you get a whole lot for your money. It's efficient, but 140 miles won't be enough for some

Aimed at: frugalists

4

HYUNDAI INSTER

PRICE: £23,505–£28,755

This is the car for people who want to downsize from something bigger but don't want to sacrifice any of the kit. Check out the sliding rear seats for instance

Aimed at: techheads

5

FIAT 500e

PRICE: £24,975–£33,975

One of the original retro tribute acts has matured into an EV while holding to its roots. Back's cramped, but there's still room for soft toys on the parcel shelf

Aimed at: millennials

SUPERMINIS

TG TIP
Techno trim with the 52kWh battery is the best all rounder and starts at £27k

1

RENAULT 4

PRICE: £26,995–£27,995

This is the Renault 4 (Luca de Meo's version), a modish small SUV with a retro jacket on that offers a smidge more practicality than the smaller 5 hatch. It's also our reigning EV of the Year. Vive la France!

Aimed at: young French farmers

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

RENAULT 5

PRICE: £22,995–£29,995

There's a delicate line to tread with a retro modern take on a stone cold classic, but Renault has managed it well with its new 5

Aimed at: retrospectives

3

SUZUKI SWIFT

PRICE: £19,699–£22,049

Latest version of the Swift shows that cheap can still leave you feeling cheerful, especially with low monthly costs and the right kit levels

Aimed at: bargain hunters

4

RENAULT CLIO

PRICE: £18,995–£25,095

The hybrid version works out a bit expensive, but the Clio is as solid a buy as it ever was – a proven package with a bit of added French flair

Aimed at: Nicole, papa, *toute la famille*

5

MINI COOPER

PRICE: £25,265–£34,905

New Mini takes the car on in all the right ways, with a sharp exterior design and tech-focused interior that's fun but still useful. Ride's a bit firm, though

Aimed at: young professionals/estate agents

FAMILY HATCHBACKS

TG TIP
Hybrid only, and stick to entry level **Elegance** trim for decent kit and best economy

1

HONDA CIVIC

PRICE: £35,780–£40,680

The strange thing about the Honda Civic is how wildly it veers from one generation to the next – you get a crazy one, then a sensible one, a crazy one... This current version is the sensible one, but that's not a bad thing – it might be conservative on the outside, but the interior is simply put together and to a high standard. You won't mind long family journeys, and you know that it'll all last for miles and miles. There's a strangely complex hybrid setup under the bonnet, but you needn't worry about all that, because the upshot is that the car drives and handles well enough, but won't cost you the earth in petrol bills. See, sometimes it does pay to be a little sensible. Though if you do want the Civic to be a bit crazy you can always go for the Type R version, which delivers in spades

Aimed at: spreadsheet users

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

SKODA OCTAVIA

PRICE: £27,610–£41,070

There must be a few noses out of joint in the darkest corporate depths of the VW Group – of the host of cars based on the MkVIII Golf, the Skoda's the best

Aimed at: people with sensible shoes

3

VOLKSWAGEN GOLF

PRICE: £28,010–£46,910

Long the benchmark in this sector, the crown has slipped a little in this eighth generation guise. We wouldn't count the Golf out for long though

Aimed at: everyone

4

MG4

PRICE: £26,995–£36,495

Popped up out of nowhere to become one of the easiest to recommend electric family hatchbacks around. Even looks good in orange

Aimed at: early adopters/taxi drivers

5

RENAULT MEGANE E-TECH

PRICE: £33,995–£37,995

The strange thing about the latest Megane is that it doesn't excel anywhere, but overall adds up to a great family car that happens to be electric too

Aimed at: stylish school runs

BEST CITY RUNABOUT

CITROEN AMI

PRICE: from £7,695

This dinky electric city car is technically a quadricycle, and you'd technically be mad to take it beyond the urban confines. Makes sense within a narrow use case (lots of short trips in town, charging at home, not many friends, etc) – particularly strong if you don't like parking

Aimed at: depressed commuters

HOT HATCHES

TG TIP
Don't be tempted by the £3.8k **Carbon Pack**, it's expensive enough as it is...

1

HONDA CIVIC TYPE R

PRICE: £51,905

Forget the slightly traditional setup of our 2022 Car of the Year, Honda's Type R follows the original hot hatch template fairly slavishly but it has kept it feeling brilliantly fresh. The electric ones have a lot of work to do if they want to compete

Aimed at: purists

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

TOYOTA GR YARIS

PRICE: £46,045–£61,750

The best Toyota ever? It really could be. The first version was a hoot to drive – fun at all speeds in all weathers. Updated one gets more bhp and an auto

Aimed at: cognoscenti

3

FORD FOCUS ST

PRICE: £38,800–£44,000

Practically Jurassic these days, but with a top notch drive this old stager can still show the youngsters where to go, particularly in ST Edition spec

Aimed at: budget purists

4

AUDI S3

PRICE: £48,650–£54,125

The S3 got much better when Audi chucked in the RS3's trick rear diff at the last facelift – this mature all rounder parties hard but likes a bit of hummus

Aimed at: single car households

5

HYUNDAI IONIQ 5 N

PRICE: £65,010

The hot hatch for the computer games generations is rammed full of gimmicks, but is still able to back it up where it really counts: on the road

Aimed at: gamers

CROSSOVERS

TG TIP
Entry level **Air** trim comes pretty well equipped – just go for the bigger battery

1

KIA EV3

PRICE: £33,005–£43,905

The Kianaissance continues apace, with an intriguing small electric effort that's finally delivering some of what we want from EVs. It's stylish, full of interesting details, about as fuss free as electric motoring gets and efficient too

Aimed at: punctual adopters

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

DACIA DUSTER

PRICE: £19,380–£27,330

If you're going to go back to basics then you really need to nail those essentials, which the Duster has managed effortlessly into its second generation

Aimed at: bargain hunters

3

VOLVO EX30

PRICE: £33,060–£47,060

The EX30 is full of Scandi cool and delightfully simple to live with. Space is admittedly tight in the back, but the interior quality makes up for it

Aimed at: stylish families

4

FORD PUMA

PRICE: £26,580–£33,880

The UK's official bestseller has taken on the torch of the Fiesta as a decent little car with solid appeal across the board. Just don't mention the old one

Aimed at: everyone

5

HYUNDAI KONA

PRICE: £26,735–£33,43E5

Korean carmaker's bold design streak continues with the latest Kona, which remains a solid family car. EV's a great first toe in the electric waters

Aimed at: number crunchers

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LUXURY SUVs

TG TIP
P510e hybrid is the way to go – in **Vogue SE** trim it's all the Range Rover you'll ever need

1

RANGE ROVER

PRICE: £105,675–£174,345

Arguably the original lifestyle SUV, the Range Rover has evolved massively since the 1970 original, developing into a luxury beast. The latest one hasn't just nailed the brief, it has set the benchmark for everyone else to follow

Aimed at: cash buyers

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

VOLVO EX90

PRICE: £82,660–£99,960

The old XC90 was starting to get left behind, but the new EX90 has wrestled its way to the front of the post SUV queue while remaining as charming as ever

Aimed at: polo necks

3

FERRARI PUROSANGUE

PRICE: £313,360

Ferrari says this definitely isn't an SUV, but ironically with its sporty credentials it's probably the most SUV out of all the SUVs that have ever been made

Aimed at: posers

4

ROLLS-ROYCE CULLINAN

PRICE: £298,800–£342,600

Even Rolls-Royce had to follow the money and make an SUV. Fortunately you can't see what it looks like from the back seat – that's the place to enjoy it

Aimed at: old money

5

BMW iX

PRICE: £75,315–£114,215

This tech-laden electric SUV takes a different approach to luxury – it's still comfortable, but it dazzles with interesting materials and nice touches

Aimed at: tech VPs

OFF ROADERS

TG TIP
Just two trims here – pricier **First Edition** is the only way to get round headlights

1

LAND CRUISER

PRICE: £77,845

The Toyota was always peerless off road, but it had everything except kerbside appeal – until this stylish retro version arrived. It might be criminal to watch a pedigree rockhopper waste away on the school run, but it gets slippery in Richmond sometimes

Aimed at: peacekeepers

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

LAND ROVER DEFENDER

PRICE: £59,960–£163,545

Everyone had an opinion about the classic Defender, but no one was buying. Now it's selling at 10x the rate and the full fat OCTA takes it further than ever

Aimed at: school run mums

3

MERCEDES-BENZ G-CLASS

PRICE: £141,065–£208,375

The looks of the G-Wagen are the same as they've ever been, but that masks the progress that's been made under the skin. The new electric one is fun

Aimed at: original gangsters

4

FORD RANGER

PRICE: £35,130–£57,360

Like a good pair of jeans, the Ranger is able to switch seamlessly from work to play, no wonder it's a trades favourite. A little bit large for parts of the UK though

Aimed at: sole traders

5

INEOS GRENADIER

PRICE: £65,015–£81,782

A passion project from a rich old billionaire who wanted a modernised version of his compromised old 4x4. Fair enough, seems to have managed it

Aimed at: old rich men

SPORTS CARS

TG TIP
Into driving? Carrera T. For everyday use, it's the base Carrera with Heritage Design interior

1

PORSCHE 911

PRICE: £103,700–£144,400

The definitive sports car, despite its inherent layout flaws, because it's been ruthlessly honed millimetre by millimetre over the past 70 years by people who really know what they're doing. Newly facelifted 992.2 version even has a hybrid option

Aimed at: heavyweights

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

ALPINE A110

PRICE: £55,160–£92,170

This stripped down French number has managed to take up the baton for feathery, beautifully handling sports cars since Lotus gave up trying

Aimed at: lightweights

3

TOYOTA GR86

PRICE: £32,495

The back to basics sports car is destined to be a future classic, and it's one of the best cars that Toyota's made (but it's no GR Yaris)

Aimed at: purists

4

PORSCHE 718 CAYMAN GTS

PRICE: £75,300

Sure, it's getting old, but the Cayman is one of those compelling driver's cars that we need to celebrate while they're still allowed to be on sale

Aimed at: B-road blasters

5

BMW M2

PRICE: £68,705

The latest version of the BMW M2 is more grown up than it used to be, but doesn't that apply to us all? It's a great daily driver that grows on you over time

Aimed at: wealthier purists

SUPERCARS

TG TIP
Don't have the £6,250 super lightweight carbon seats. Regular buckets are much better

1

McLAREN 750S

PRICE: £252,260

Launched in 2023 as a successor to the 720S, McLaren really stepped it up with this car – it's better to drive than its predecessor, but crucially it's also better to sit in and easier to operate. It even comes with Apple CarPlay...

Aimed at: rich Shanghai drivers

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

FERRARI 296 GTB

PRICE: £241,550

People got nervous when they heard this Ferrari supercar would be a V6 hybrid... they needn't have worried, it all serves to make it a better drive

Aimed at: self-made business people

3

LAMBORGHINI REVUELTO

PRICE: £452,040

There's hybrid tech in there, but there's also a socking V12 in what could very well be the best Lamborghini since the iconic 1960s Miura

Aimed at: high rollers

4

PORSCHE 911 GT3 RS

PRICE: £192,600

You've got to be a good driver to get the most out of the GT3 RS's repertoire, but Porsche has thrown everything it has at this racer for the road

Aimed at: amateur racers

5

LAMBORGHINI TEMERARIO

PRICE: £260,035

The Huracán replacement has gone plug-in hybrid, but that doesn't mean it'll sip petrol like a Toyota Prius, it's all about the performance insists Lambo

Aimed at: ULEZ inhabitants

HYPERCARS

TG TIP
It'd be sacrilegious to change anything on Gordon's car, but he'll paint it how you like

1

GMA T.50

PRICE: £2.8 MILLION

Gordon Murray had already done it all with the McLaren F1 back in the 1990s, but you always sensed he had a bit more to prove. And here's the result, the car that shows lightning doesn't just strike twice, it'll do it exactly where Gordon tells it to. "The last great analogue supercar" was what Gordon Murray promised – and he's delivered it with relentless attention to detail and a dedication to the end prize. With the electric era almost upon us, we'll probably never see the likes of this pure, undiluted V12-powered monster ever again. It's not just the sum of Murray's knowhow and experience distilled into a ruthless hypercar, you can get something out of it without being an F1 driver, it's an enjoyable drive for whoever happens to be behind the wheel. Your move, everyone else

Aimed at: loaded enthusiasts

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

FERRARI F80

PRICE: £3.7 MILLION

The new flagship Ferrari is the prancingest horse of the lot. Bad luck if you actually wanted one though, all 799 of them have been sold already

Aimed at: bedroom posters

3

PAGANI UTOPIA

PRICE: £2.2 MILLION

In a truly utopian society we'd all be driving one of these. It's not bad for a third car – easy to forget that Pagani's been very discerning about its model lineup

Aimed at: tech billionaires

4

ASTON MARTIN VALKYRIE

PRICE: £3 MILLION

The 'F1 car for the road' line has become a bit of a cliche, but the Valkyrie is certainly visceral and noisy enough to be considered that way

Aimed at: rich collectors

5

KOENIGSEGG JESKO

PRICE: £2.9 MILLION

Well it's named after the boss's dad, so it had to be a good car – and it is. Certainly worthy of a pat on the head, well done son

Aimed at: Monaco residents

BEST DELIVERY VAN

FORD TRANSIT

PRICE: £42,235–£65,188 [plus VAT]

There's a good reason this is the candidate most likely to be blocking your drive when you're in a hurry – the Transit is the original and the best, the prime choice of those with lots of stuff to get somewhere. The electric one is great, the diesel remains the best option

Aimed at: load luggers

BIG FAMILY CARS

TG TIP
It only costs £500 extra to go for the **7-seat** over the 5-seat model – a no brainer

1

VW ID.BUZZ 7-SEAT

PRICE: £59,645–£69,045

The ID.Buzz is not merely another retro face (that's the sugar on the electric pill), in many ways it's an innovative bit of family transport, especially in its seven-seater guise that finally releases the practicality the car needed

Aimed at: lifestyle families

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

SKODA SUPERB ESTATE

PRICE: £37,225–£49,765

This car has always had to be good with a name like that, but it's hard to think of any other family estate out there that does a better job for the money

Aimed at: posh families

3

BMW i5 TOURING

PRICE: £69,955–£100,005

You wait ages for an electric family estate and then a brilliant one comes along all at once. Shows off all of BMW's electric knowhow and body control wizardry

Aimed at: the outside lane

4

HYUNDAI SANTA FE

PRICE: £47,890–£58,745

Stylish, well built, comfortable and quiet – not to mention loads of room inside for carrying people and stuff. Hyundai's hot streak continues

Aimed at: sensible families

5

HYUNDAI IONIQ 9

PRICE: FROM £65,000 (TBC)

The electric Ioniq 9 is Hyundai's new flagship – bigger than the Santa Fe, believe it or not. It'll carry seven, looks bonkers and manages up to 384 miles

Aimed at: slightly richer families

GRAND TOURERS

TG TIP
Got a dog? Aston's got you – the **Pet Pack** throws in a bed and a portable washer

1

ASTON VANQUISH

PRICE: FROM £330,000

The Vanquish has been reborn – sounds a little grand, but the latest version has brought the car right up to date for its third incarnation. It mixes an exciting drive with genuine grand touring ability in a way that must have all its rivals quaking

Aimed at: secret agents

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

FERRARI 12CILINDRI

PRICE: £336,500

Ferrari has softened the edges off the 12Cilindri's forebears to create a car that's probably the most capable all rounder to have come out of Maranello

Aimed at: watch collectors

3

BENTLEY CONTINENTAL GT

PRICE: £152,820–£257,700

If you had to drive really far there's probably no car you'd rather be in than the Continental GT. Except maybe a chauffeur driven Phantom of course

Aimed at: pipe smokers

4

PORSCHE 911 TURBO

PRICE: £200,600

The 911 range is like one of those Italian gelaterias with hundreds of flavours – seems excessive, but we love them all. Turbo might be the pick of the bunch

Aimed at: daily drivers

5

MASERATI GRANTURISMO

PRICE: £125,355–£178,560

A GT by name and a true GT by nature – this latest GranTurismo has avoided the temptation to go a little *too* sporty and nails the brief. EV's good too

Aimed at: tassled loafers

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SHORTLIST

CAR BUYING QUANDARY? SHORTLIST IS AT YOUR SERVICE

Dear *TopGear*,

I've just bought a massive house and my sensible family estate just looks too tiny next to it on the expansive driveway. Can you suggest something suitably enormous with room for four that will look a bit more proportional?

Karen, Oxfordshire

This isn't really a problem any of us at *TopGear* necessarily have, Karen, but we must admit that we love a good car buying conundrum. And here it's certainly a case of go big *and* go home, but with the added benefit of a shorter walk. We're assuming you enjoy the use of a ridiculously oversized turning circle on your driveway, otherwise it's going to be a bit of a nightmare getting any of our shortlisted behemoths in and out of the front garden. We did consider the likes of the Kia EV9, but it might not be the look you're going for. We also might be tempted to question whether bigger really is any better, but then you've probably already paid a massive chunk of stamp duty to sit in your new shrunken palace. You've *earned* that seventh bedroom. You're buying your ginormous car at the right time though – new cars have never been bigger than they are today, so you really have your pick in terms of finding the right porker for your property.

Your options...

Rolls-Royce Phantom

From £440,000

Is this big enough? The wheels are the same height as the average UK man and if you park a Rolls Phantom in the same place long enough you actually have to apply for planning permission. You'll need a driver, too

OUR WINNER

Land Rover Defender 130

From £84,070

The Defender 130 is one of the longest mainstream cars on sale in the UK at 5.4m – it's 0.4m shorter than a Phantom though, but it does have the benefit of being more affordable (!), usable and practical

RC Motorhomes RC12M

From £650,000

This absolute monster is based on a Volvo lorry and weighs in at 12 tonnes, more than a match for your mansion. It has four slide out elements and is great for guests you don't want in the house

WORDS: SAM BURNETT **PHOTOGRAPHY:** GETTY

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